

BIOGRAPHY OF FARHAD MAZHAR

Poet, Philosopher and
The Radical Imagination of
Bangladesh



S M Nazmuz Sakib

Biography of Farhad Mazhar: Poet, Philosopher and The Radical Imagination of Bangladesh

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Biography of Farhad Mazhar: Poet, Philosopher and The Radical Imagination of Bangladesh

Part One: The Origins of a Radical Mind

Intellectual Formation, Philosophical Foundations, and the Making of a Thinker in the Postcolonial World

Parts One through Eight

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This work is a comprehensive intellectual biography and philosophical analysis of Farhad Mazhar (b. 1947), the Bangladeshi poet, philosopher, social activist, agrarian theorist, constitutional critic, and public intellectual. The eight-part study examines his intellectual formation in the Bengal delta, his theoretical development through engagements with Western Marxism, postcolonial theory, Islamic philosophy, and the Baul and Fakiri traditions of Lalon Shah, his constitutional theory of constituent power and popular sovereignty, his agrarian philosophy and the founding of the Nayakrishi Andolon, his role as a public intellectual and the founding of *Chinta* magazine, and his influence on the 2024 mass uprising in Bangladesh and its aftermath through the February 2026 constitutional referendum and general election.

The work engages with political philosophy, constitutional theory, postcolonial studies, philosophy of religion, ecological jurisprudence, agrarian studies, and Bengali literary criticism.

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PART ONE: THE ORIGINS OF A RADICAL MIND

Intellectual Formation, Philosophical Foundations, and the Making of a Thinker in the Postcolonial World

PROLOGUE: WHY FARHAD MAZHAR MATTERS

There are thinkers who inhabit a single tradition, mastering its grammar and perfecting its methods, and there are thinkers who break across traditions the way rivers break across geological formations, carving new terrain precisely because they refuse to be contained. Farhad Mazhar belongs decisively to the second category. He is a Bangladeshi poet, a philosopher of the first rank, a social activist of extraordinary persistence, an agrarian theorist, a constitutional critic, a Marxist heterodox in the richest possible sense of that phrase, a spiritual seeker who takes Fakir Lalon Shah as seriously as he takes Karl Marx, and a public intellectual who has refused, at enormous personal cost, to be domesticated by any of the powerful institutions of Bangladeshi political and cultural life.

To understand Farhad Mazhar is to undertake a journey across an astonishing range of intellectual territory. One must follow him from the riverine landscape of Noakhali in the southeastern delta of Bengal to the pharmacy schools of Dhaka, then across the Atlantic to the streets of New York City and the seminars of the New School for Social Research, and finally back again to Bangladesh where he would spend the better part of five decades building one of the most distinctive and controversial intellectual projects in the history of the subcontinent. His thought does not rest comfortably inside any single disciplinary or ideological box. It refuses the separation between philosophy and agriculture, between spiritual practice and political economy, between the university seminar and the open field where farmers negotiate with seed and soil.

This textbook is written in eight parts. Part One is concerned with the intellectual origins of Farhad Mazhar. It asks where he came from, not merely in the geographical sense, but in the sense of which traditions, which crises, which intellectual encounters, and which historical upheavals formed the sensibility and the analytical framework from which all his later work proceeds. This is therefore a book about formation as much as about achievement. It is a book about the conditions that make radical thinking possible and about the costs, personal and political, that such thinking extracts from those who pursue it in societies where radical thought is treated as either subversion or madness, and very frequently as both at the same time.

Part One is also, necessarily, a book about Bangladesh itself, about the peculiar conditions of postcolonial thought in a nation born in 1971 from one of the most violent and contested political upheavals of the twentieth century, a nation that carries within its constitutional and cultural

DNA the unresolved tensions of colonial inheritance, the trauma of partition, the contradictions of a liberation struggle conducted in the name of a people who were subsequently marginalized within the very state that liberation created. Farhad Mazhar's thought cannot be separated from this context. Indeed, it would not have taken the shape it did had Bangladesh been an ordinary postcolonial state. The peculiar intensity and peculiar contradictions of Bangladeshi political life are constitutive of his intellectual personality.

Before beginning, a word on method is necessary. This textbook treats Farhad Mazhar as simultaneously a biographical subject, a philosophical thinker deserving rigorous analysis, a political actor whose interventions must be evaluated in historical context, and a cultural figure whose significance for Bengali literature is comparable in certain respects to the significance of his engagement with political philosophy. The method is therefore synthetic: it draws on intellectual biography, political theory, jurisprudence, postcolonial studies, philosophy of religion, agricultural science and its politics, and comparative literature. It refuses the disciplinary separations that would make Mazhar legible only in one register and illegible in all others.

A further word on the use of theory is also in order. This textbook makes extensive use of theoretical frameworks drawn from European philosophy, from postcolonial theory, from critical legal studies, from the philosophy of religion, and from political economy. This is not because these frameworks are superior to the indigenous theoretical traditions that Mazhar himself draws on and champions. It is because Mazhar himself operates at the intersection of these traditions and it would be a form of intellectual falsification to pretend otherwise. The great Bangladeshi thinker does not simply reject Western theory in favor of Lalan's songs. He places them in genuine dialogue, compels them to illuminate each other, and in doing so, produces a synthesis that is original and that cannot be properly understood unless both sides of the dialogue are taken seriously. This textbook attempts to honor that complexity.

CHAPTER ONE: A SON OF NOAKHALI: BIRTH, COLONIAL INHERITANCE, AND THE MAKING OF A CONSCIOUSNESS

Farhad Mazhar was born on the ninth of August, 1947, in Noakhali, a district in the southeastern part of what was then Bengal, a province of British India. The date of his birth is not merely a biographical fact; it is a fact saturated with historical irony of the most profound kind. He was born two days before what the British authorities formally designated as the partition of India on the fourteenth and fifteenth of August, 1947. He entered the world, therefore, in a Bengal that was already being divided, already being drawn and quartered by the cartographic violence of Cyril Radcliffe's boundary commission, which produced within a matter of weeks the lines that would cut through communities, irrigation systems, railway networks, and above all through human lives and human solidarities that had been built over centuries.

Noakhali itself was a place whose name carried enormous historical weight in the very year of Mazhar's birth. Just eleven months before his birth, in October of 1946, Noakhali had been the site of one of the most devastating episodes of communal violence in the entire history of the

partition period. The Great Noakhali riots of 1946, in which Hindu communities were targeted in a wave of violence that killed thousands and displaced tens of thousands more, had shocked the subcontinent and had moved Mahatma Gandhi to undertake his famous march through the district in a desperate effort at reconciliation. Gandhi's Noakhali march, conducted in the winter of 1946 and 1947, remains one of the most dramatic acts of political witness in the history of South Asian nonviolence. It was into this landscape, still scarred by that violence, still trembling with its aftermath, still negotiating the meaning of what had happened and what was about to happen, that Farhad Mazhar was born.

This detail about the circumstances of his birth matters for understanding Mazhar's thought in ways that go beyond the merely anecdotal. Thinkers who are formed in landscapes of communal violence, of partition, of the catastrophic failure of political systems to protect the communities they ostensibly represent, tend to develop certain characteristic intellectual preoccupations. They tend to be skeptical of the state as a guarantor of justice. They tend to take seriously the question of how communities build solidarity and trust outside of formal political institutions. They tend to be suspicious of nationalist narratives that claim clean origin points and heroic lineages. They tend to be drawn to the messy, ambiguous, and often violent reality of political formation as it actually occurs, rather than the sanitized versions that official histories prefer. All of these preoccupations are visible throughout Mazhar's intellectual career, from his earliest writings to his most recent interventions in the constitutional debates triggered by the mass uprising of 2024.

Noakhali in 1947 was also a place shaped by the particular ecology of the Bengal delta. It was a landscape of rivers, of seasonal flooding, of extraordinary agricultural fertility, and of deep poverty. The people of the delta had developed over centuries an intimate and practical relationship with their natural environment, an ecology of knowledge about seeds, soils, water, and seasonal change that bore no resemblance to the abstract, universalizing knowledge systems of modern agricultural science. This ecologically grounded knowledge tradition would become one of the central concerns of Mazhar's mature intellectual work, and it is not difficult to see the roots of that concern in the landscape of his birth.

The Bengal delta was also a landscape shaped by the long history of Sufi Islam, of the Baul and Fakiri traditions, of the devotional movements that had produced, over many centuries, a religious and philosophical culture that was distinctively different from the orthodox and textual Islam of the urban scholarly class. The syncretic religious culture of the Bengal delta, which drew on Hindu Vaishnavism, on Islamic Sufism, on Buddhist traditions that had survived in fragmented form, and on the animist traditions of the indigenous peoples of the region, had produced thinkers and singers of extraordinary power and originality. Chief among these, in terms of his subsequent importance for Mazhar's intellectual project, was Fakir Lal Shah, the nineteenth century mystic, philosopher, and singer whose songs would become one of the central objects of Mazhar's philosophical attention.

The Bengal delta was, in other words, a place that generated a particular kind of intellectual culture: syncretic, ecologically grounded, suspicious of formal authority whether religious or secular, oriented toward practice and toward the concrete textures of lived experience rather than toward abstract doctrines. This culture was not without its internal contradictions and its own forms of hierarchy and exclusion. But it represented a genuine alternative to the dominant

knowledge traditions of both colonial modernity and orthodox religious practice, and it is this alternative that Mazhar would spend his intellectual life trying to excavate, articulate, and bring into dialogue with the theoretical resources of the modern West.

The political geography of Mazhar's early life was shaped by the successive transformations of Bengal's political status. Born in British India, he became a citizen of the new state of Pakistan in 1947 when Noakhali fell on the eastern side of Radcliffe's line and became part of East Pakistan. He was, therefore, from the first years of his consciousness, a citizen of a state that was, in every meaningful sense, a colonial state: a state in which the dominant economic, political, and cultural power resided in a different geographical region speaking a different language and pursuing policies that systematically disadvantaged the people of the east. The Pakistani state's exploitation of East Bengal, which included the transfer of resources from east to west, the imposition of Urdu as the national language despite the fact that the vast majority of Pakistan's population spoke Bengali, and the systematic political exclusion of the Bengali majority from the levers of national power, were the formative political facts of Mazhar's childhood and adolescence.

The Language Movement of 1952, in which students and activists in Dhaka took to the streets to demand recognition of Bengali as an official language of Pakistan, was a defining event of the political culture in which Mazhar grew to intellectual maturity. The killing of student protesters by Pakistani police on the twenty-first of February, 1952, a date that would subsequently be declared International Mother Language Day by UNESCO, was not merely a political event; it was a philosophical event, a demonstration that language is not merely a medium of communication but a terrain of political struggle, a site at which questions of sovereignty, dignity, and the right to exist as a people are contested and sometimes resolved in blood. This philosophical lesson, that language and culture are political matters of the highest urgency, runs through everything Mazhar would subsequently write.

It is important, in analyzing the intellectual formation of any thinker, to resist the temptation of retrospective determinism, the assumption that everything about the adult intellectual was already implicit in the conditions of childhood. Human consciousness is not simply a reflection of its material conditions. It involves choices, encounters, readings, conversations, and above all the exercise of intellectual freedom, the capacity to think against as well as with the conditions of one's formation. Mazhar's intellectual development would involve both a deep engagement with the traditions and conditions of his origin and a radical departure from many of the assumptions and orthodoxies that those traditions carried.

Nevertheless, it is possible to identify, in the landscape of Noakhali in the late 1940s and 1950s, several of the fundamental orientations that would mark Mazhar's intellectual career. The experience of communal violence and its aftermath would generate a lifelong skepticism about nationalist politics and their tendency to draw sharp lines between communities. The ecological richness of the delta landscape would generate a lifelong commitment to thinking about the relationship between human communities and their natural environments. The syncretic religious culture of the region would generate a lifelong openness to spiritual thought and practice that could not be accommodated within the secular categories of orthodox Marxism. And the political subordination of the Bengali people within the Pakistani state would generate a lifelong

commitment to thinking about sovereignty, constitutionalism, and the relationship between a people and the political institutions that claim to represent them.

The colonial inheritance that Mazhar received was, moreover, not only a political inheritance but a philosophical one. British colonialism in Bengal had produced one of the most complex and contested fields of intellectual production in the history of modern thought. The Bengali response to colonialism had included the Hindu reformism of Ram Mohan Roy, the nationalist thought of Aurobindo Ghosh, the mystical philosophy of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, the revolutionary nationalism of Subhas Chandra Bose, the literary modernism of Rabindranath Tagore, and the radical political thought of the Communist Party of India, among many other traditions. This extraordinarily rich field of colonial-era Bengali intellectual production was part of the cultural inheritance that any serious Bengali thinker of the twentieth century was obliged to engage with, and Mazhar's engagement with it, which would be critical, selective, and deeply original, would occupy him throughout his intellectual career.

The specific form of Muslim Bengali identity that Mazhar inherited was also a complex phenomenon. Muslim Bengalis occupied a peculiar position in the intellectual and cultural geography of the subcontinent. They were Muslims, which meant they shared a religious tradition with the dominant group in the Pakistani state, but they were Bengalis, which meant they shared a linguistic and cultural tradition with the Hindu Bengalis who had remained in India after partition. They were simultaneously insiders and outsiders in relation to both the Pakistani and the Indian national projects, and this double marginality generated, for the most perceptive of their thinkers, a perspective of unusual critical acuity. From the margins of both national projects, it was possible to see the limitations of both, to see the ways in which both Pakistani nationalism and Indian secular nationalism failed to accommodate the actual diversity and complexity of the people they claimed to represent.

This double marginality was not simply a disadvantage. It was also an intellectual resource. The thinker who is fully at home in neither of the dominant ideological frameworks of their time is compelled, if they are serious, to develop an alternative framework, to find other conceptual resources, to ask different questions. This is precisely what Mazhar would do. His intellectual career is in many respects an extended attempt to build an alternative intellectual framework adequate to the experience of a people who had been failed by all the available frameworks, by colonial liberalism, by Pakistani nationalism, by the secular nationalism of the Awami League, by the orthodox Marxism of the left, and by the political Islam of the Jamaat.

CHAPTER TWO: THE UNIVERSITY OF DHAKA, PHARMACY, AND THE DOUBLE LIFE OF THE YOUNG RADICAL

Farhad Mazhar entered the University of Dhaka in the early 1960s, at a moment when the political temperature of East Pakistan was rising toward what would eventually become the great conflagration of 1971. The University of Dhaka was, in this period, the intellectual heart of Bengali political and cultural life, a place where the contradictions of the Pakistani state were most visibly played out and where the resistance to those contradictions was most clearly

articulated. It was a place where every serious student was, in some sense, also a political actor, where the choice of what to read and with whom to associate were choices with immediate political implications.

Mazhar's academic choice of pharmacy was, on the surface of it, an unexpected one for someone who would become one of the most significant radical thinkers of his generation. Pharmacy is, after all, a practical science, concerned with the preparation and dispensing of medicines, with the chemistry of therapeutic compounds, with the interaction of substances in the human body. It does not seem, on the face of it, to be a natural training ground for a poet and philosopher. But Mazhar's choice of pharmacy is, on reflection, entirely consistent with certain deep tendencies in his intellectual character. He was drawn, throughout his life, to the intersection of the theoretical and the practical, to forms of knowledge that had immediate consequences for the lives of real people, to disciplines that demanded both rigorous analytical thinking and practical engagement with the material world. Pharmacy, understood not merely as a professional skill but as a form of applied chemistry, as a science of the relationship between substances and organisms, between natural compounds and living bodies, is not so distant from the ecological and agricultural thinking that would later become central to his intellectual project.

The University of Dhaka in the early 1960s was also a place where Marxist thought was a central intellectual current. The leftist student movement, which operated through organizations like the East Pakistan Students Union and its various affiliated bodies, was deeply embedded in university life. The debates of the international communist movement, including the Sino-Soviet split of the early 1960s, had their echoes in the corridors of Dhaka University, and young intellectuals were obliged to take positions on questions of revolutionary strategy, on the relationship between the national liberation struggle and the class struggle, on the proper understanding of imperialism and its relationship to the local ruling class.

Mazhar was drawn into this intellectual and political milieu, and he emerged from it with a commitment to Marx that would remain central to his thinking throughout his life, even as the form of that commitment would change dramatically over time. The young Mazhar who read Marx in Dhaka in the 1960s was not yet the heterodox Marxist who would later subject the orthodox left to withering criticism. But the seeds of that later critique were already being planted. Mazhar's reading of Marx was, from the beginning, attentive to the dimensions of Marx's thought that the orthodox left tended to ignore or suppress: the philosophical dimensions, the Hegelian inheritance, the theory of alienation and its relationship to the question of human emancipation, the complex relationship between the materialist critique of ideology and the positive content of what a liberated human existence might look like.

The context of the University of Dhaka in the 1960s also brought Mazhar into contact with the living tradition of Bengali poetry and literature. Bengali literature in this period was experiencing a period of significant modernist ferment, shaped by the encounter between the rich classical and folk traditions of Bengali literary culture and the modernist movements of European and international literature. The poets of the Hungry Generation movement, the prose writers experimenting with new forms of social realism, and the critics attempting to develop new theoretical frameworks for understanding Bengali literary production were all part of the intellectual atmosphere that surrounded Mazhar during his formative years.

Mazhar's own emergence as a poet dates from this period, and it is worth pausing to consider what it means for his intellectual project that he is, first and foremost, a poet. The relationship between philosophy and poetry has been a contested one throughout the history of Western thought, most famously since Plato's expulsion of the poets from his ideal republic in the *Republic*. But in the Bengali tradition, this separation was never as sharp or as doctrinally enforced as it was in the Western philosophical tradition. Tagore's philosophy was inseparable from his poetry. Lalon's metaphysics was expressed through song. The great Bengali tradition of philosophical poetry, running from the medieval Vaishnava poets through the Bauls and Fakirs to Tagore and beyond, had established a different relationship between the conceptual and the aesthetic: one in which the poem was not merely an ornament to the philosophical argument but was itself a form of philosophical thinking, a way of knowing that the prose argument could not replace.

Mazhar would bring this understanding to his intellectual project. His poetry is not decorative. It is not a relaxation from the rigors of theoretical work. It is itself a form of intellectual activity, a way of engaging with questions that prose cannot exhaust. This is why any account of Mazhar as a thinker that treats his poetry as separate from his philosophy fundamentally misunderstands the structure of his intellectual project.

The graduation of Farhad Mazhar with honors in pharmacy from the University of Dhaka in 1967 marked the formal completion of his undergraduate education but by no means the end of his intellectual formation. Bangladesh in 1967 was East Pakistan on the eve of its most convulsive political crisis. The Agartala Conspiracy Case, in which the Pakistani government accused Sheikh Mujibur Rahman of planning to collaborate with India in a conspiracy to separate East Pakistan from the federation, had intensified political tensions to the breaking point. The Six Point Movement, which Sheikh Mujib had launched in 1966 and which demanded sweeping fiscal, economic, and political autonomy for East Pakistan, was becoming the dominant political force in the east.

The young pharmacist was navigating a political landscape that was being rapidly polarized between, on one side, the Bengali nationalist movement led by Mujib and the Awami League, and on the other, the Pakistani military establishment and its civilian allies in the west. The left, which included multiple competing communist parties and student organizations, occupied an uneasy and unstable position in this polarized landscape, torn between solidarity with the Bengali national cause and the theoretical requirement to maintain a class analysis that could not simply reduce the national question to a class question or vice versa.

Mazhar's engagement with these questions during this period was shaped by his reading of Marx but also by his encounter with other theoretical traditions that would prove formative. The debates in international Marxist thought about the national question, running from Lenin's classic formulation of the right of nations to self-determination through the subsequent disputes about how to apply this principle in specific colonial and postcolonial contexts, were directly relevant to the situation of East Bengal. But so were the debates in postcolonial thought about the relationship between national liberation and social transformation, debates that were being conducted simultaneously in Asia, Africa, and Latin America by thinkers who were grappling

with the specific conditions of colonial subordination and the ambiguous legacy of independence.

The Algerian Revolution, which had concluded in 1962, was a particularly significant reference point. Frantz Fanon's analysis of colonial violence, of the psychic and cultural dimensions of colonial domination, and of the complex dynamics of national liberation struggles had been circulating in radical intellectual circles internationally since the early 1960s. Fanon's argument in *The Wretched of the Earth*, that the colonized people must pass through the violence of decolonization in order to reconstitute their shattered subjectivity, raised questions that were directly relevant to the situation of the Bengali people within the Pakistani state, even if the specific colonial relationship involved was different in significant ways from the relationship Fanon was analyzing.

The intellectual encounter with Fanon, and with the broader tradition of postcolonial radical thought that his work represented, added a dimension to Mazhar's thinking that orthodox Marxism, with its predominantly class-based analysis, struggled to accommodate. The question of the colonized subject, of how the experience of colonial domination shapes the consciousness and the sense of self of the colonized people, and of what must happen to that consciousness in the process of liberation, was a question that required philosophical as well as political-economic analysis. It was a question that opened onto questions of psychology, of culture, of language, of religious practice, of the formation of subjectivity itself. These were questions that Mazhar would pursue throughout his intellectual career, but their seeds were planted in this early period of encounter with the political crisis of East Pakistan.

CHAPTER THREE: NEW YORK AND THE NEW SCHOOL: POLITICAL ECONOMY, EXILE, AND THEORETICAL FORMATION

After his graduation from the University of Dhaka in 1967, Farhad Mazhar made his way to New York City, where he would spend the better part of the 1970s and 1980s working as a pharmacist and studying political economy at the New School for Social Research. This period of his life is, in many respects, the crucial period of his intellectual formation, the period in which he acquired the theoretical tools that would serve him throughout his subsequent career and the period in which he encountered the intellectual traditions that he would later bring into dialogue with the philosophical and cultural resources of his Bengali heritage.

New York City in the late 1960s and the 1970s was one of the great centers of intellectual and political ferment in the world. The city was experiencing a confluence of social movements: the civil rights movement and its more militant successors, the anti-Vietnam war movement, the women's liberation movement, the Black Power movement, the Puerto Rican independence movement, and a variety of other struggles that were transforming the political landscape of American cities and generating new theoretical frameworks for understanding power, oppression, and resistance. For a young Bengali intellectual shaped by the anti-colonial politics of East Pakistan, this environment was both exhilarating and clarifying. It demonstrated that the struggle against oppression was not a peculiarly Bengali or South Asian phenomenon but a

global one, and that the theoretical tools developed in one context might have applications, suitably modified, in very different contexts.

The New School for Social Research, where Mazhar studied political economy, was itself a remarkable institution with a distinctive intellectual character. Founded in 1919 by a group of progressive intellectuals who broke with Columbia University over issues of academic freedom, the New School had subsequently become a center for critical thought, particularly after its transformation in the 1930s into a refuge for European scholars fleeing fascism. The University in Exile, as the New School's graduate faculty was known, had brought to New York some of the most distinguished scholars of the Frankfurt School tradition and of European social science more broadly, creating a remarkable concentration of critical theoretical work that would shape American intellectual life for decades.

By the time Mazhar arrived at the New School, the institution had developed a distinctive intellectual culture that combined rigorous empirical social science with critical theoretical reflection, that took seriously both the European continental philosophical tradition and the Anglo-American analytical tradition, and that maintained a commitment to understanding social and political phenomena in their historical specificity rather than reducing them to universal laws. This combination was ideally suited to the intellectual needs of a thinker like Mazhar, who was concerned simultaneously with the specific historical conditions of Bangladesh and with the general theoretical frameworks that might illuminate those conditions.

The study of political economy at the New School exposed Mazhar to a range of theoretical traditions that went well beyond the orthodox Marxism he had encountered in Dhaka. The Frankfurt School tradition, with its synthesis of Marxist political economy, Freudian psychoanalysis, and Hegelian philosophy, offered a much richer and more complex account of the reproduction of capitalist society than the base-superstructure model of vulgar Marxism. The critical theory of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, with its analysis of the culture industry and the administered society, raised questions about the relationship between economic structures and cultural forms that were directly relevant to Mazhar's concern with the politics of culture and language in Bangladesh.

The work of Herbert Marcuse, particularly his analysis of one-dimensional society and the ways in which advanced capitalist societies managed and contained political opposition, was also significant. Marcuse's synthesis of Marx and Freud, his concept of repressive desublimation, and his analysis of the relationship between libidinal economy and political economy offered resources for thinking about forms of oppression and resistance that went beyond the narrowly economic. These resources would prove useful to Mazhar as he developed his analysis of the relationship between spirituality, embodied practice, and political resistance in the Bengali context.

The period of Mazhar's studies at the New School was also the period during which the Liberation War of Bangladesh was fought and won. In 1971, the Pakistani military launched Operation Searchlight, a genocidal assault on the Bengali population of East Pakistan that killed, by conservative estimates, hundreds of thousands of people and generated a refugee crisis of enormous proportions. The Liberation War that followed, in which Bengali freedom fighters

backed by Indian military intervention defeated the Pakistani army, resulted in the creation of Bangladesh as an independent state in December of 1971. For Mazhar, living and studying in New York, the Liberation War was not an abstract political event. It was a catastrophic and transformative moment in the life of his people, a moment that confirmed many of his theoretical intuitions about colonial violence and national liberation and raised new and urgent questions about what kind of state the newly liberated Bangladesh would become.

The 1972 constitution of Bangladesh, drafted by the Constituent Assembly that had been elected in the 1970 general elections under the Pakistani framework, established a parliamentary republic with four state principles: nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism. These four principles, known as the Mujib-ism or the four pillars, represented the ideological framework of the Awami League government led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Bangabandhu or Friend of Bengal, who had led the independence struggle and now led the new state. Mazhar, observing this constitutional settlement from New York with the critical tools of political economy and critical theory, saw in it a number of fundamental problems that would shape his subsequent engagement with Bangladeshi politics.

The most fundamental problem, which Mazhar would articulate with increasing clarity over the subsequent decades, was the problem of constituent power. The constitution of 1972 was drafted and adopted by an assembly that had been elected for the purpose of participating in the Pakistani constitutional process, not for the purpose of constituting a new Bangladeshi state. The people of Bangladesh had not been asked, through any direct democratic process, to authorize the constitutional framework that was being imposed on them in their name. The social contract of the new state was, in this sense, deficient at its foundation: it lacked the genuine constituent power of the people that Mazhar would later argue was the necessary basis of any legitimate constitutional order.

This argument, which Mazhar would develop into a systematic constitutional theory over the subsequent decades, is grounded in a specific philosophical tradition that has deep roots in both Western and non-Western political thought. The concept of constituent power, as distinct from constituted power, has its classical Western formulation in the work of the Abbe Sieyes, the French revolutionary thinker who argued in his famous pamphlet *What is the Third Estate?* that the nation, as the source of all constitutional authority, must be distinguished from the government and legislative bodies that the constitution brings into being. Sieyes's distinction between the *pouvoir constituant*, the constituent power of the people, and the *pouvoir constitue*, the constituted power of the government established by the constitution, would become one of the central concepts of modern constitutional theory.

The subsequent theoretical development of this distinction is a rich and complex story that runs through the constitutional thought of Kant, Hegel, and the German idealist tradition, through the revolutionary constitutionalism of the American and French revolutions, through the constitutional theory of the Weimar Republic and Carl Schmitt's controversial analysis of constitutional moments and states of exception, through Hannah Arendt's reflections on the political meaning of founding acts and revolutionary constitutions, and into the contemporary debates in constitutional theory between theorists like Bruce Ackerman, who has developed the concept of constitutional moments in the context of American constitutional history, Juergen

Habermas, who has attempted to ground constitutional legitimacy in the procedures of deliberative democracy, and Antonio Negri, who has developed a radical theory of constituent power as an immanent force of democratic self-constitution that can never be finally captured or contained by any specific constitutional form.

Mazhar's later constitutional thought would draw on many of these traditions, but it would also draw on specifically Bengali and South Asian resources that the European constitutional tradition had no access to. The concept of constituent power, as Mazhar would develop it in his 2023 book on mass uprising and constitution, is not simply a derivative of the European tradition. It is a concept that has been rethought in the light of the specific experience of Bangladesh and of the philosophical traditions of the Bengal delta.

The New York period was also, crucially, the period during which Mazhar deepened his engagement with Marx's philosophical writings, and particularly with the early Marx of the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, the German Ideology, and the Grundrisse. The recovery and critical analysis of these earlier writings, which had been largely neglected by the orthodox Marxist tradition in favor of the more economic works of Capital and the Critique of Political Economy, was one of the major intellectual events of the 1960s and 1970s in Western Marxist scholarship. The young Marx of the 1844 Manuscripts, with his concept of alienation, his critique of political economy as a form of dehumanization, his philosophical anthropology of the species-being, and his vision of communism as the practical abolition of alienation rather than merely the redistribution of economic product, was a very different Marx from the Marx of orthodox dialectical materialism.

The rediscovery of the philosophical Marx was closely associated with the development of Western Marxism as a distinct intellectual tradition, a tradition represented by thinkers like Lukacs, Gramsci, Korsch, the Frankfurt School, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Althusser, among many others. These thinkers differed among themselves on many questions, but they shared a commitment to taking seriously the philosophical dimensions of Marx's thought and to developing a Marxism that was adequate to the complexity of capitalist societies in the twentieth century, societies that could not be adequately understood through the crude base-superstructure model of economic determinism.

For Mazhar, the encounter with this tradition of Western Marxism was liberating in a specific sense. It freed him from the obligation to choose between a mechanistic Marxism that could not account for the cultural and spiritual dimensions of Bengali political life and a simple rejection of Marx in favor of some other theoretical framework. Western Marxism showed that it was possible to remain committed to the fundamental insights of historical materialism, to the critique of capitalism, to the analysis of class and exploitation, while at the same time taking seriously the relative autonomy of culture, ideology, and subjectivity, while at the same time engaging with the philosophical questions about consciousness, freedom, and human emancipation that the orthodox tradition had tended to dismiss as bourgeois idealism.

The specific form of this liberation was, for Mazhar, the possibility of a Marxism that could engage seriously with religious thought and practice without either dismissing religion as mere ideology or uncritically celebrating it as authentic folk consciousness. The conventional Marxist

position on religion, grounded in Marx's famous description of religion as the opium of the people, tended to treat religious belief and practice as a form of false consciousness that would dissolve as class consciousness developed and as the material conditions of exploitation were transformed. This position was not only philosophically inadequate, in the sense that it failed to explain why religion persisted in conditions of advanced capitalism and industrial development, but it was also politically disastrous in the context of Bangladesh, where the religious traditions of the people, including both Islam and the syncretic Baul and Fakiri traditions, were central to the cultural life and the political consciousness of the rural majority.

A Marxism that could only engage with religion as something to be overcome was a Marxism that had nothing to say to the peasants and workers of the Bengal delta, who lived their lives in and through religious categories and practices that were not simply errors to be corrected but genuine responses to the conditions of their existence. Mazhar's encounter with the philosophical dimensions of Marx's thought, and with the Western Marxist tradition that had tried to take these dimensions seriously, gave him the conceptual resources to begin developing an alternative approach: a Marxism that could engage with religion as a genuine form of social and political thought, a Marxism that could find in the mystical and devotional traditions of the Bengal delta not merely obscurantism to be overcome but genuine philosophical resources for thinking about freedom, community, and human flourishing.

The New York period was also the period during which the independent state of Bangladesh underwent its first major political crisis. In 1974 and 1975, the Mujib government, beset by famine, corruption, and political opposition, moved toward authoritarian rule, establishing a one-party state under the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League in 1975. In August of the same year, Mujib and most of his family were assassinated by a group of army officers in a coup that marked the beginning of a long period of military rule in Bangladesh. The assassins proclaimed a new political direction for Bangladesh, initially moving the country away from secularism and toward a closer identification with Islamic political norms, and subsequently establishing military-backed governments that would dominate Bangladeshi politics until the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1990 and beyond.

Watching these events from New York, Mazhar was developing the analytical framework that would inform his subsequent engagement with Bangladeshi politics. The crisis of the Mujib government confirmed his suspicion that the constitutional settlement of 1972 was fundamentally flawed, that it had failed to establish the genuine popular sovereignty that Bangladesh's liberation had seemed to promise. The subsequent military regimes and the political parties that emerged under their shadow, including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party of Ziaur Rahman and subsequently the Jatiya Party of Hussein Muhammad Ershad, confirmed his analysis that Bangladesh's constitutional system was structurally incapable of delivering genuine democratic governance.

CHAPTER FOUR: MARX WITHOUT DOGMA: FARHAD MAZHAR'S REINVENTION OF HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

When Farhad Mazhar returned to Bangladesh from New York, he brought with him not a fixed ideological position but an ongoing intellectual project, a set of questions that he had been pursuing through his study of political economy and philosophy and that he intended to continue pursuing in the specific context of Bangladesh. Chief among these questions was the question of how to develop a Marxism adequate to the conditions of postcolonial Bangladesh, a Marxism that could take seriously both the material conditions of exploitation and the cultural and spiritual dimensions of the life of the Bengali people.

This project required, first of all, a critical engagement with the Marxism that already existed in Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi left in the 1970s and 1980s was fragmented into numerous competing parties and factions, each claiming to represent the authentic tradition of Marxism-Leninism and each using the theoretical authority of that tradition to delegitimize its competitors. These parties were united, despite their mutual hostility, by a set of theoretical commitments that Mazhar found fundamentally inadequate. They shared a commitment to economic determinism, the view that the economic base determines all other aspects of social life. They shared a commitment to the vanguard party as the proper form of revolutionary organization. They shared a commitment to the Soviet or Chinese model of socialist construction as the appropriate goal of the revolutionary struggle. And they shared a deep suspicion of religious thought and practice, which they tended to dismiss as feudal superstition or ruling-class ideology.

Mazhar's critique of this orthodox left was not a critique from the right. He did not abandon Marx for liberalism or for some form of postmodern skepticism that rejected grand narratives altogether. His critique was, rather, a critique from within the Marxist tradition but from a position within that tradition that the orthodox parties were unwilling to occupy. Mazhar argued that the orthodox left's reading of Marx was a systematic distortion, that it had taken the most mechanistic and least philosophically interesting aspects of Marx's thought and elevated them into a rigid orthodoxy, while suppressing or ignoring the dimensions of Marx's work that were most philosophically rich and most relevant to the conditions of postcolonial societies.

The specific dimension of Marx's thought that Mazhar found most important and most systematically suppressed by the orthodox tradition was Marx's analysis of alienation and his conception of what he called species-being or *Gattungswesen*. In the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, Marx had developed a philosophical anthropology that conceived of human beings as fundamentally creative beings, beings whose essence consisted in their capacity to objectify themselves in the world through labor, to make the world an expression of their powers and their consciousness. Capitalism, in Marx's analysis, was a system that systematically perverted this essential creative activity by converting it into alienated labor: labor that is not an expression of the worker's creative power but a mere means of survival, labor that enriches the capitalist while impoverishing the worker not merely materially but spiritually and existentially.

This analysis of alienation and its overcoming was, for Marx, the philosophical foundation of the communist project. Communism, as Marx understood it in his early writings, was not merely a redistribution of economic product or a change in the ownership of the means of production. It was the practical abolition of alienation, the restoration of genuine human creative activity, the realization of species-being in concrete historical conditions. This was a vision with obvious

philosophical connections to the Hegelian tradition from which Marx had emerged, and it was a vision with obvious implications for thinking about culture, spirituality, and the meaning of human existence that went far beyond the narrowly economic concerns that the orthodox tradition tended to privilege.

Mazhar's recovery and rehabilitation of this dimension of Marx's thought was not merely a scholarly exercise. It was a strategic intervention in the political and intellectual debates of Bangladesh, an attempt to open up a space within the Marxist tradition for engaging with the religious and cultural dimensions of Bengali political life that the orthodox left was systematically foreclosing. If the communist project was, at its philosophical core, about the realization of human creative powers and the abolition of forms of alienation that prevented human beings from living fully and freely, then the question of what counted as alienation and what counted as genuine human flourishing was not a question that could be answered by reference to economic data alone. It required philosophical inquiry into the nature of human experience, and that inquiry could not afford to ignore the religious and mystical traditions that had, for centuries, been exploring precisely these questions in the context of the Bengal delta.

The Bengali mystical tradition, and particularly the tradition associated with Lalon Shah Fakir, had developed, through song and practice rather than through systematic philosophical argument, a set of answers to the questions about human freedom, human creativity, and the conditions of genuine human flourishing that were both philosophically sophisticated and culturally grounded in the specific experience of the Bengal delta. Mazhar's project was to bring these answers into dialogue with the philosophical resources of the Marxist tradition, not to collapse the two traditions into each other or to pretend that they were simply saying the same thing in different languages, but to establish a genuine intellectual encounter between them that would be productive for both.

This project required a specific understanding of what philosophy is and how it works. Mazhar did not accept the dominant understanding of philosophy in the Western academic tradition, which tends to conceive of philosophical knowledge as a set of propositional truths established through argument and open to universal validity regardless of cultural context. For Mazhar, following both the Bengali mystical tradition and certain strands of Western philosophy associated with figures like Heidegger and the later Wittgenstein, genuine philosophical knowledge is always contextual, always embedded in specific practices and forms of life, always inseparable from the embodied experience of concrete historical subjects. This does not mean that philosophy is merely subjective or that philosophical knowledge cannot be shared across cultural boundaries. But it does mean that the form in which philosophical knowledge is expressed and transmitted is always culturally specific, and that the attempt to translate it into a universal and culturally neutral language inevitably involves loss and distortion.

This epistemological position had immediate and radical implications for the practice of political theory and for the critique of ideology. If philosophical knowledge is always embedded in specific cultural practices and forms of life, then the claim of any particular theoretical system, whether Marxism or liberalism or political Islam, to provide a universally valid framework for understanding social and political reality must be treated with deep suspicion. Each of these systems carries within it the specific cultural and historical assumptions of the context in which it

was produced, and the attempt to apply it mechanically to very different contexts is likely to produce distortion rather than illumination.

This does not mean that cross-cultural theoretical exchange is impossible or worthless. It means that it must be conducted with philosophical humility and with genuine attention to the specific conditions and traditions of the context to which the theoretical resources are being applied. It means that the theorist operating in a postcolonial context must develop the capacity to be both a receiver and a critic of theoretical traditions originating in the colonial metropolis: to take from those traditions what is genuinely illuminating while subjecting their culturally specific assumptions to critical scrutiny.

Mazhar's practice of this kind of critical theoretical engagement is one of the most distinctive and admirable features of his intellectual work. He is not a theorist who applies European frameworks to Bangladesh. He is a theorist who places European frameworks in genuine dialogue with Bengali traditions, allowing each to illuminate and challenge the other. The result is a body of intellectual work that is genuinely original, that cannot be adequately characterized as either Western theory applied to a non-Western context or as a simple defense of indigenous tradition against Western influence.

In understanding Mazhar's Marxism, it is also important to attend to the specific dimension of Marx's thought that concerns the formation of revolutionary subjects. Marx's historical materialism is not merely a theory of economic structures; it is also a theory of how those structures shape, and are in turn shaped by, the consciousness and the practical activity of the human beings who live within them. The question of how oppressed people develop the consciousness and the organizational capacity to challenge the structures that oppress them, the question of what Marx called class-consciousness, is one of the central questions of Marxist political theory and one that has generated an enormous literature of analysis and debate.

For Mazhar, this question takes a specifically postcolonial form. In the context of Bangladesh, the formation of revolutionary subjects cannot be understood through the categories of industrial class consciousness that Marx developed in the context of nineteenth-century European capitalism. The rural majority of Bangladesh, the peasants and small farmers of the Bengal delta, do not relate to the structures of their exploitation through the form of consciousness that Marx associated with the industrial proletariat. Their social experience, their cultural traditions, their forms of organization and solidarity, and their articulation of their political aspirations are all shaped by a different set of historical and cultural conditions.

The question of how to understand the political consciousness and the political capacity of the rural poor of Bangladesh, without either romanticizing them as naturally revolutionary subjects or dismissing them as backward and in need of liberation by a vanguard party of enlightened intellectuals, was one that Mazhar pursued with genuine intellectual rigor. His answer, which would develop over many years of engagement with both theoretical resources and practical experience through his work with UBINIG and the Nayakrishi Andolan, was that the political consciousness of the rural poor must be understood on its own terms, in relation to the specific cultural and ecological conditions of their lives, and that the intellectual's role is not to impose a

theoretical framework on this consciousness but to engage with it in a process of genuine mutual learning.

This position has obvious resonances with the pedagogy of the oppressed developed by the Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire, whose work was highly influential in radical intellectual circles internationally from the late 1960s onward. Freire's concept of conscientization, the process through which oppressed people develop a critical consciousness of their condition through dialogue and engagement with their own experience, is consonant in important ways with Mazhar's approach to the relationship between the intellectual and the rural poor. But Mazhar's version of this approach is distinctive in its specific cultural grounding in the Bengali tradition and in its engagement with the philosophical resources of that tradition.

The concept of *bhav*, which is central to the Baul and Fakiri tradition of the Bengal delta and which Mazhar would develop into one of the central concepts of his own philosophical vocabulary, can be understood in part as a response to the question of how political consciousness is formed and expressed in the specific conditions of rural Bengal. *Bhav*, which cannot be adequately translated by any single English word but which hovers between feeling, idea, emotion, orientation, and disposition, is the term used in the Bengali folk philosophical tradition to describe the mode of engagement with reality that characterizes the Baul and Fakiri way of being. It is not a purely cognitive state; it involves the whole person, the body as well as the mind, the emotional as well as the intellectual life. It is cultivated through practice, through song, through movement, through community. And it has political implications: the person who has developed genuine *bhav* is not the kind of person who can be easily manipulated by ruling-class ideology, who can be persuaded to act against their own genuine interests, who can be kept in the state of false consciousness that capitalism and colonial modernity require.

Mazhar's recovery and philosophical elaboration of the concept of *bhav* is one of his most original contributions to political philosophy, and one that has no precise equivalent in any tradition of Western political thought. It represents his attempt to develop a concept adequate to the specific conditions of Bengali political life, a concept that can describe the forms of consciousness and solidarity through which the rural poor of Bangladesh have historically maintained their dignity and their resistance, and that can be articulated in ways that make it productive for contemporary political theory.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE POSTCOLONIAL CONDITION AND BENGALI INTELLECTUAL LIFE

Any serious engagement with the thought of Farhad Mazhar must grapple with the concept of the postcolonial condition and its specific form in Bangladesh. Postcolonial theory, as it developed in Anglo-American academic institutions from the 1980s onward through the work of scholars like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and their successors, offered a set of analytical frameworks for understanding the ongoing effects of colonial domination on the cultures, economies, and political systems of formerly colonized societies. These frameworks have been enormously influential and have generated a vast literature of analysis and critique.

But postcolonial theory, as it developed in the Western academy, has also attracted significant criticism. It has been accused of being too focused on discourse and representation at the expense of material conditions and political economy. It has been accused of being too metropolitan in its orientation, developing theoretical frameworks in and for Western academic institutions rather than for the communities that colonial domination had actually damaged. It has been accused of being too pessimistic, of emphasizing the difficulty of escaping colonial epistemological frameworks without offering any concrete account of how such escape might be achieved. And it has been accused of being theoretically imperialistic, imposing European categories of analysis, even in a critical mode, on the cultural traditions of the formerly colonized.

Farhad Mazhar's relationship to postcolonial theory is, appropriately, both engaged and critical. He shares the postcolonial theorists' concern with the ongoing effects of colonial domination on the intellectual and cultural life of formerly colonized societies. He shares their skepticism about the claims of Western knowledge systems to universal validity. He shares their interest in recovering and rehabilitating the intellectual traditions that colonial domination had suppressed or marginalized. But he is also critical of postcolonial theory's tendency to remain at the level of discourse analysis and representation, without engaging with the material conditions and the concrete political struggles of the people it claims to speak for.

Mazhar's critique of postcolonial theory is part of a broader critique of what he calls the educated elite, the class of educated professionals and intellectuals in Bangladesh who consume and produce theoretical work in international languages and international institutional contexts but who are fundamentally disconnected from the lived experience and the political consciousness of the majority of the people they claim to represent. This critique is not a simple anti-intellectualism. Mazhar is himself an intellectual, deeply committed to the practice of theoretical reflection and to the importance of getting theoretical questions right. His critique is rather a critique of a specific social form of intellectual practice, one that is organized around the prestige of certain institutional contexts and certain languages rather than around genuine engagement with the questions that matter most for the communities involved.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, one of the most eminent figures of postcolonial theory, has a well-documented personal and intellectual relationship with Farhad Mazhar that illuminates both the connections and the tensions between his intellectual project and the mainstream of postcolonial scholarship. In her 2012 Kyoto Prize lecture, Spivak credited Mazhar with introducing her to the devotional tradition of Lalon Shah Fakir, a tradition that subsequently became important to her own thinking about subaltern epistemologies and the limits of Western theory. This is a remarkable acknowledgment: one of the most distinguished figures in international postcolonial scholarship acknowledging her debt to a Bangladeshi poet and philosopher who had introduced her to a tradition that her own sophisticated theoretical apparatus had not enabled her to discover on its own.

The relationship between Mazhar and Spivak illustrates a broader dynamic in the relationship between postcolonial theory and the intellectual traditions of the Global South. The metropolitan postcolonial theorist, equipped with the prestige of Western university appointment and access to international publishing networks, has the power to determine which traditions of the formerly colonized world are brought to international attention. But this power comes with the risk that

the tradition, in the process of being brought to international attention, is translated into the terms of the metropolitan theoretical discourse in ways that distort or impoverish it. Mazhar's own engagement with Lalon is not a translation of Lalon into the terms of European theory; it is a philosophical elaboration of Lalon on Lalon's own terms, followed by a placing of those terms in genuine dialogue with European thought.

The postcolonial condition in Bangladesh has specific features that distinguish it from the postcolonial condition as analyzed in other national contexts. Bangladesh is a postcolonial state that carries within its history not one but two layers of colonial domination: the British colonial period and the period of Pakistani domination that followed. The Liberation War of 1971, which created Bangladesh as an independent state, was in important respects a second decolonization, a liberation from a colonial relationship that had simply changed its form with the transfer of power from British to Pakistani hands. This double colonial inheritance shapes the specific form that the postcolonial condition takes in Bangladesh and adds layers of complexity to the questions of sovereignty, identity, and cultural authenticity that postcolonial theory addresses.

The intellectual life of Bangladesh in the decades following independence has been shaped by a set of fundamental tensions that are characteristic of the postcolonial condition but that take specifically Bangladeshi forms. There is the tension between the secular nationalist tradition of the Awami League, which grounds Bangladeshi national identity primarily in Bengali language and culture and in the secular principles of the 1972 constitution, and the tradition of political Islam, which grounds Bangladeshi national identity in the shared Muslim faith of the majority of the population and which was associated, in the immediate post-independence period, with political forces that had collaborated with the Pakistani military in 1971. There is the tension between the urban educated elite, who consume international theoretical and cultural production and who see themselves as the natural leaders of Bangladeshi development, and the rural majority, who live their lives in relation to very different cultural and philosophical traditions. And there is the tension between the demands of international capital and the international financial institutions that exercise enormous influence over Bangladeshi economic policy, and the needs and aspirations of the rural and urban poor who constitute the majority of the Bangladeshi population.

Mazhar's intellectual project engages with all of these tensions, but it does so from a distinctive angle that refuses the conventional positions in each of the relevant debates. He is neither a secular nationalist nor a political Islamist; neither a defender of the urban elite's intellectual authority nor a simple populist who romanticizes the wisdom of the rural poor; neither a critic of globalization who retreats into cultural nationalism nor a defender of the international neoliberal order. His position is more complex and more original than any of these conventional orientations, and it is precisely this complexity and originality that makes him difficult to categorize and that has made him, throughout his career, a controversial figure who attracts admiration and hostility in roughly equal measure from all sides of the political spectrum.

The intellectual landscape of Bangladesh that Mazhar has navigated is one of the most politically charged and intellectually restricted in Asia. The history of censorship, harassment, and violence against writers and intellectuals in Bangladesh is long and disturbing. The assassination of secular bloggers and writers by Islamist extremists in the 2010s, the harassment and prosecution

of journalists and activists by successive governments of both the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, and the use of legal instruments including sedition laws, cybercrime laws, and contempt of court provisions to suppress critical speech have created an environment in which independent intellectual work is genuinely dangerous. Mazhar's willingness to continue pursuing his intellectual project in this environment, at considerable personal cost, is itself an intellectual and moral achievement worthy of recognition.

CHAPTER SIX: THE POET EMERGES: LITERARY RADICALISM AND THE BENGALI TRADITION

Farhad Mazhar is, by his own account and by the account of his most serious readers, first and foremost a poet. His philosophical and political work grows out of and is sustained by his practice of poetry, and any account of his intellectual contribution that treats his poetry as a secondary or decorative element fundamentally misunderstands the structure of his work. This chapter examines the emergence of Mazhar as a poet, the specific character of his poetic contribution, and the relationship between his poetry and the broader philosophical and political project of his intellectual career.

Bengali poetry has one of the richest and most ancient literary traditions in the world. The language has produced, over more than a thousand years, an extraordinary range of poetic forms and voices, from the medieval court poetry of the Pala and Sena periods, through the devotional poetry of the Vaishnava movement and the mystical songs of the Bauls and Fakirs, to the revolutionary modernism of Tagore, who almost single-handedly transformed Bengali literature by bringing the resources of English, French, and German modernism into dialogue with the classical and folk traditions of Bengal. After Tagore, Bengali poetry entered a period of intense experimentation that continued through the twentieth century, with poets like Jibanananda Das, Sudhindranath Datta, and subsequently the poets of the partition generation and the generation that came of age in the newly independent Bangladesh developing new formal strategies and new thematic concerns.

Mazhar's entry into this literary tradition was marked from the beginning by a double ambition: to be a poet in the full classical sense, to write poems that achieved the kind of formal and emotional perfection that the tradition recognized as genuine poetry, and at the same time to make poetry do philosophical work, to use the poem as a vehicle for exploring the kinds of questions about human existence, political reality, and the possibility of freedom that the tradition of Bengali philosophical poetry, from the Vaishnava padavali to the Baul songs, had always explored.

His relationship with the devotional tradition of the Bauls and Fakirs is not simply scholarly or theoretical. It is a relationship of genuine artistic influence. The Baul and Fakiri tradition is characterized by specific formal features: the use of musical rhythm and the song form, the employment of paradox and apparent contradiction to express truths that cannot be stated directly, the use of the body as a philosophical metaphor, and the cultivation of a mode of address that is simultaneously intimate and cosmic, personal and political. These formal features

have left their mark on Mazhar's own poetry, which employs paradox and contradiction not as rhetorical devices but as genuine philosophical strategies, ways of pointing toward realities that propositional language cannot adequately capture.

The emergence of Mazhar as a significant voice in Bengali poetry was recognized by the broader literary establishment with some degree of ambivalence, an ambivalence that is characteristic of the reception of genuinely original work. On one hand, his technical accomplishment and his passionate intelligence were recognized even by critics who were deeply uncomfortable with the political and philosophical positions his poems articulated. On the other hand, his refusal to operate within the conventional categories of either secular leftist poetry or religious devotional poetry made him difficult to place within the existing critical frameworks, and the complexity and density of his poetic language, which demands that the reader bring both philosophical and cultural knowledge to the encounter with the poem, made him an acquired taste rather than an immediately accessible voice.

The density and complexity of Mazhar's poetic language are related to the philosophical ambitions of his poetry. He is attempting, in his poems, to articulate forms of experience and insight that cannot be translated without remainder into prose argument. The poem, for Mazhar, is not a vehicle for positions that could equally well be expressed in an essay or a manifesto. It is a mode of knowing that has its own irreducible logic, its own specific capacity to grasp and communicate truths that prose cannot reach. This understanding of the poem's cognitive function places him in a tradition of philosophical poetry that includes not only the Bauls and the Vaishnavas but also the great tradition of European philosophical poetry running from Lucretius through Dante, Milton, and Goethe to Holderlin, Rilke, and Celan.

His major poetic collections include *Ebadatnama* (Book of Devotions), which is widely regarded as one of the significant collections in contemporary Bangladeshi poetry. The title itself signals the philosophical and spiritual ambitions of the collection: *ebadatnama*, meaning a book of acts of worship or devotion, places the poetry in the tradition of Islamic spiritual poetry while simultaneously opening that tradition to radical critique and philosophical elaboration. The collection explores the relationship between devotion and freedom, between submission to God and the assertion of human dignity, between the spiritual and the political, in ways that are simultaneously faithful to the tradition and deeply challenging to its conventional interpretations.

The poem has been, throughout history, one of the primary forms through which communities have articulated their understanding of justice, their sense of what kind of life is worth living, and their aspiration toward forms of human existence that go beyond the merely given. This is why Plato, who understood the political power of poetry better than almost anyone, was so anxious to expel the poets from his ideal republic: because he knew that the poet's capacity to articulate alternative visions of the good life was a threat to the philosopher-king's monopoly on the definition of the good. Mazhar's poetry is political in precisely this sense: it articulates alternative visions of human existence, of community, of the relationship between the spiritual and the political, that challenge the hegemonic definitions offered by both the state and the orthodox ideological traditions that support it.

The concept of radical literary theory that informs Mazhar's poetic practice is worth examining in some detail. Mazhar is not a naive expressivist who believes that the poem is simply the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling. Nor is he a formalist who believes that the poem's value lies entirely in its formal structure independent of its content or its referential relationship to the world. He occupies a position that is closer to the dialectical aesthetics developed in different ways by thinkers like Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and more recently by the literary theorist Terry Eagleton, a position that sees the work of art as both autonomous, having its own internal logic and formal integrity, and socially situated, shaped by and speaking to the specific historical conditions of its production.

For Mazhar, the poem is both an act of individual creation and a social practice embedded in the traditions and conditions of Bengali literary culture. The poet is not a sovereign creator *ex nihilo* but a participant in a tradition, a tradition that constrains but also enables, that demands fidelity to certain established forms and conventions while also leaving room for innovation and departure. The great Bangladeshi poet is both a receiver of a tradition and a transformer of it, and the quality of the transformation is measured not merely by the novelty of the result but by the depth and fidelity with which the received tradition has been understood and engaged.

CHAPTER SEVEN: PHILOSOPHY AS PRACTICE: FROM THEORY TO GROUND

One of the most striking features of Farhad Mazhar's intellectual career is his refusal to separate the practice of philosophy from the practice of political and social engagement. For Mazhar, philosophy is not a purely academic activity, not a set of arguments to be developed in university seminars and published in scholarly journals for the consumption of other professional philosophers. Philosophy is a practice, a way of engaging with the world, a form of attention to reality that has immediate implications for how one lives and for what one does in the world. This understanding of philosophy as practice, as a way of life rather than merely a set of propositions, has deep roots in both the Western and the Bengali philosophical traditions.

In the Western philosophical tradition, the understanding of philosophy as a way of life has been recovered and articulated most powerfully in the twentieth century by Pierre Hadot, the French scholar of ancient philosophy whose work on the spiritual exercises of the Stoics, Epicureans, and Neoplatonists demonstrated that ancient philosophy was not primarily a theoretical enterprise but a practical one: a set of exercises and practices through which the philosopher transformed their way of relating to the world and to other people. Hadot's analysis showed that the sharp distinction between theory and practice, between the philosophical argument and the philosophical life, was a relatively recent development in the history of Western philosophy, one that was not present in the ancient tradition and that has involved a significant impoverishment of what philosophy can be and do.

In the Bengali tradition, the understanding of philosophy as a way of life has never needed to be recovered because it was never lost. The great figures of the Bengali philosophical tradition, from the Vaishnava saints to the Baul and Fakiri masters, were philosophers precisely in the sense that Hadot describes: their philosophical work was inseparable from their way of living,

from their spiritual practices, from their relationships with their communities. Lalon Shah Fakir was not a philosopher in the academic sense of someone who produces philosophical arguments. He was a philosopher in the sense of someone whose entire way of life was an expression of and an exploration of philosophical insight.

Mazhar's understanding of philosophy as practice connects his intellectual work to his activist work in ways that might otherwise seem puzzling. His founding of UBINIG, his co-founding of the Nayakrishi Andolan, his engagement with rural farmers and their agricultural practices, his advocacy for food sovereignty and against the commercialization of seeds and genetic resources: these are not diversions from his philosophical work. They are his philosophical work, conducted through the medium of practical engagement rather than through the medium of prose or poetry. The philosophical insight that emerges from his engagement with the Nayakrishi farmers, the understanding of how communities maintain their ecological knowledge, how they negotiate with the changing conditions of their natural environment, how they resist the impositions of corporate agribusiness and state development bureaucracies, is not less philosophically significant than the insight that emerges from his reading of Heidegger or his analysis of Marx. It is different in its form, but it is equally genuine as philosophical knowledge.

This understanding of the relationship between theory and practice has important implications for Mazhar's conception of the intellectual's role in society. The intellectual, for Mazhar, is not someone who sits above the fray of social and political life, producing disinterested analysis for the benefit of whoever might consume it. The intellectual is someone who is engaged in the struggle for human emancipation, someone who brings their theoretical capacities to bear on the concrete problems and possibilities of that struggle, someone who is in a relationship of genuine mutual learning with the communities they work with and for. This is a conception of the intellectual's role that has resonances with Gramsci's concept of the organic intellectual, the intellectual who grows out of and maintains connections with a specific social class and who articulates that class's understanding of the world and its aspirations for social change.

But Mazhar's conception of the intellectual's role is not simply a recycling of Gramsci's concept. It is inflected by the specific conditions of Bangladesh and by Mazhar's understanding of the Bengali philosophical tradition. The organic intellectual in Gramsci's sense is someone whose intellectual work is aligned with the interests and the consciousness of the working class, and who helps the working class to develop a coherent and comprehensive worldview that challenges the hegemony of the ruling class. Mazhar's intellectual, by contrast, is someone whose work is shaped by and in dialogue with a much wider range of social and cultural traditions, including the Baul and Fakiri traditions, the traditions of Islamic mysticism, the traditions of indigenous ecological knowledge, and the traditions of Bengali literary culture.

The implications of this conception of the intellectual for Mazhar's own practice are visible in the specific forms that his work has taken. He has not limited himself to writing philosophical essays and poetry for an educated audience. He has also written for general audiences through his column in Bangladeshi newspapers and on his website, chintaa.com. He has engaged in public lectures and discussions in universities, in community centers, and in political gatherings. He has worked directly with farmers in the Nayakrishi movement, learning from their experience and sharing his own theoretical insights in ways that could be practically useful. And he has engaged,

throughout his career, in direct political advocacy, in the public articulation of positions on the most contested political questions facing Bangladesh.

This combination of activities has made Mazhar something of a unique figure in the intellectual life of Bangladesh. He is simultaneously a producer of serious theoretical work, a public intellectual, a political activist, and a practicing poet. He refuses the specialization and the disciplinary division of labor that characterize the intellectual life of advanced capitalist societies, where the poet is expected to stay in the domain of poetry, the philosopher in the domain of philosophy, the activist in the domain of politics. His refusal of these divisions is itself a philosophical statement, an assertion that the human capacity for thought and for creative engagement with the world cannot and should not be divided into specialized compartments that serve the interests of institutional power.

CHAPTER EIGHT: UBINIG AND THE POLITICS OF DEVELOPMENT ALTERNATIVE

The founding of UBINIG, the Policy Research for Development Alternative, represents one of the most concrete expressions of Farhad Mazhar's philosophical and political commitments. UBINIG was established in 1984 as an independent policy research and advocacy organization working with grassroots communities in Bangladesh to develop alternatives to the dominant models of economic development. The name itself signals the organization's ambitions: it is a policy research organization, not a charity or a service delivery agency, and it is concerned with development alternatives, with the exploration and articulation of forms of social and economic organization that are genuinely different from the neoliberal model that the international development establishment was, in the 1980s, increasingly imposing on countries like Bangladesh.

The founding of UBINIG in 1984 was no accident of timing. The 1980s were the decade in which the Washington Consensus, the set of neoliberal economic policies promoted by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the United States Treasury, was being aggressively promoted as the only viable model of economic development for countries receiving international financial assistance. Structural adjustment programs, which required recipient countries to cut social spending, privatize state enterprises, liberalize trade and finance, and subordinate domestic economic policy to the imperatives of international capital markets, were being imposed on dozens of countries in the Global South. Bangladesh, deeply dependent on international aid and remittances, was not immune to these pressures.

The dominant development ideology of the 1980s combined a market fundamentalism that treated the free market as the uniquely legitimate allocator of resources and opportunities with a technocratic discourse that presented development as a technical problem to be solved by experts applying universal principles, rather than as a political problem involving genuine conflicts of interest between different social groups. This ideology was, from Mazhar's perspective, both theoretically false and politically dangerous. It was theoretically false because the free market, far from being a natural or neutral mechanism, was a historically specific institution produced

and maintained by particular configurations of political power. And it was politically dangerous because it systematically undermined the capacity of communities to make collective decisions about their own economic futures and to develop forms of economic organization responsive to their own needs and values.

UBINIG's engagement with these questions was not purely theoretical. The organization worked directly with communities in rural Bangladesh, particularly with women farmers who were the primary custodians of agricultural knowledge and biodiversity in the Bengal delta, to document and support their practices and to develop policy positions that could advocate for those practices in the national and international political arena. This work involved a distinctive methodology that combined empirical research, participatory engagement with communities, and theoretical reflection, producing forms of knowledge that were simultaneously rigorous and practically useful.

The concept of food sovereignty, which UBINIG and its associated Nayakrishi Andolan did much to develop and popularize in the South Asian context, represents one of the most important intellectual contributions to emerge from Mazhar's work with UBINIG. Food sovereignty, as distinct from food security, insists that the right to food is not merely a right to have access to sufficient calories but a right of communities to determine their own food systems: to decide what they grow, how they grow it, who controls the seeds and the land, and how food is distributed and consumed within and between communities. This distinction between food security and food sovereignty has become increasingly important in global debates about agricultural policy, trade, and the governance of genetic resources, and UBINIG's work has been recognized internationally as a significant contribution to the development of this concept.

The philosophy underlying the food sovereignty framework developed by UBINIG is directly connected to Mazhar's broader philosophical commitments. The insistence that communities must have the right and the capacity to determine their own food systems is an expression of the same concern with genuine popular sovereignty that animates his constitutional theory. The argument that the commercialization of seeds and genetic resources by transnational corporations constitutes a form of dispossession that deprives communities of the foundations of their economic and cultural life is an application of the Marxist concept of primitive accumulation, the historical process through which communities are separated from the means of their subsistence and forced into a dependent relationship with capital, to the specific conditions of contemporary agricultural capitalism.

The relationship between seed politics and constitutional politics in Mazhar's thought is not coincidental. Both are expressions of the same fundamental concern: the concern with the capacity of communities to be the genuine authors of their own collective life, to exercise real sovereignty over the conditions of their existence rather than merely nominal sovereignty through the periodic exercise of the franchise. The farmer who loses control of her seeds to a multinational corporation loses a fundamental dimension of her sovereignty over her own life and the life of her community, in a way that is analogous to the citizen who loses control of the constitutional framework that governs the political community through the imposition of a constitution that does not express her genuine constituent will.

The founding and development of UBINIG also gave Mazhar the opportunity to develop in practice his understanding of the relationship between theory and practice, between the intellectual and the communities they engage with. The methodology of UBINIG was not a methodology in which expert researchers extracted information from communities and processed it according to their own theoretical frameworks. It was a methodology of genuine co-production, in which the knowledge of the communities, their understanding of their own ecological conditions and agricultural practices, their experience of the impacts of development interventions and market forces, was treated as a primary source of insight rather than merely as raw data to be interpreted by outside experts.

This methodology had important implications for the kind of knowledge that UBINIG produced. UBINIG's research reports and policy documents were distinctive in their combination of empirical richness, theoretical sophistication, and practical orientation. They drew on the knowledge of the communities they worked with while also situating that knowledge within broader theoretical frameworks drawn from political economy, ecology, and the philosophy of science. The result was a form of knowledge production that challenged the conventional boundaries between the academic and the activist, between the theoretical and the practical, between the expert and the community member.

CHAPTER NINE: LALAN, BHAV, AND THE SUBALTERN METAPHYSICS OF THE BENGAL DELTA

No account of Farhad Mazhar's intellectual project is complete without a sustained engagement with his relationship to Fakir Lalon Shah and to the philosophical tradition that Lalon represents. This relationship is at the heart of Mazhar's most original philosophical contribution and it is the aspect of his work that is most difficult for Western-trained readers to engage with adequately, precisely because it requires entering into a philosophical universe that has no exact parallel in the Western tradition and that cannot be adequately understood through the application of Western theoretical categories.

Fakir Lalon Shah was born around 1772 and died in 1890, living to the remarkable age of approximately 118 years, a biographical fact that has itself become part of the philosophical legend surrounding his figure. He lived in the Kushtia district of what is now Bangladesh, and he was a singer, composer, and spiritual teacher whose songs, transmitted orally through generations of disciples and subsequently written down and published, constitute one of the most extraordinary bodies of philosophical poetry in any language. Lalon's songs address the fundamental questions of human existence: the nature of the self, the relationship between the human and the divine, the question of how human beings can live in freedom rather than in bondage, the nature of time and its relationship to eternity, the relationship between the body and the spirit.

Lalon's philosophical tradition, sometimes called the Baul tradition though he himself rejected this label, is rooted in the syncretic spiritual culture of the Bengal delta. It draws on elements of Hindu Vaishnavism, Islamic Sufism, and Buddhist Tantra, refusing the sharp boundaries

between religious traditions that the orthodox establishments of all three sought to enforce, and developing instead a spiritual philosophy that emphasized the primacy of inner experience, the importance of the body as a site of spiritual knowledge, the rejection of caste and class distinctions as barriers to genuine spiritual community, and the cultivation of a mode of being in the world characterized by joyful engagement, creative practice, and deep compassion.

Mazhar's engagement with Lalon begins from the premise that Lalon is not merely a folk singer or a popular religious figure but a philosopher in the full sense of the term: a thinker who has developed, through a lifetime of practice and reflection, a comprehensive account of human existence and its possibilities. This premise is itself controversial. The academic establishment, both in Bangladesh and in the West, has tended to treat Lalon as an object of ethnographic or literary study rather than as a philosophical interlocutor. The disciplines of ethnomusicology, folklore studies, and religious studies have produced extensive scholarly literature on Lalon's songs and their cultural context, but this literature has rarely engaged with the songs as philosophical texts in the sense that requires the scholar to take their philosophical claims seriously and to evaluate them on their own terms.

Mazhar's project of philosophical rehabilitation of Lalon involves demonstrating that Lalon's songs contain a coherent and sophisticated philosophical vision that can be placed in productive dialogue with the traditions of European philosophy. In his books *Bhabandolon* and *Shainjir Doinno Gyan*, both published in the 2000s, Mazhar undertakes this demonstration through a series of close readings of Lalon's songs that bring out the philosophical dimensions of their language and imagery while also placing them in conversation with thinkers from Hegel to Heidegger.

The concept of *bhav* is central to this project. In Lalon's songs, *bhav* refers to the fundamental mode of engagement with reality that the spiritual practice cultivated by the Fakiri tradition is aimed at developing. It is not an emotion in the simple psychological sense, not a feeling that comes and goes in response to external stimuli. It is a transformed mode of being in the world, a way of relating to all aspects of existence, including the body, other people, the natural environment, and the divine, that is cultivated through sustained practice and that constitutes the fundamental condition of genuine human freedom.

The resonances between Lalon's concept of *bhav* and certain key concepts in the European philosophical tradition are striking and philosophically significant. Mazhar draws particular attention to the resonance between *bhav* and Heidegger's concept of *Stimmung*, usually translated as mood or attunement, which Heidegger identifies as a fundamental existential structure of *Dasein*, the human mode of being. For Heidegger, *Stimmung* is not a psychological state in the ordinary sense but a fundamental way in which human beings are always already attuned to the world, always already finding themselves in a specific relationship to the totality of what is. The philosophical analysis of *Stimmung* is not the analysis of subjective emotional states but the analysis of a dimension of human existence that is more fundamental than the distinction between the subjective and the objective.

The resonance between *Stimmung* and *bhav* is not a coincidence or a superficial similarity. It points to a shared philosophical concern with the way in which human beings are not primarily

cognitive subjects confronting an objective world but rather beings who are always already engaged with the world in a specific mode of attunement that precedes and grounds all cognitive activity. This shared concern is significant because it suggests that the philosophical questions that Lalon's songs are addressing are not peculiar to the Bengali tradition but are questions that arise, in different cultural and linguistic forms, wherever human beings reflect seriously on the conditions of their own existence.

At the same time, bhav and Stimmung are not identical concepts. Bhav, in the Lalon tradition, is not merely a structure of human existence in general but a specific mode of attunement that is cultivated through practice and that constitutes the goal of the spiritual life. It is not merely how human beings always already find themselves but how they can and should transform themselves through the disciplines of the Fakiri path. This transformative and practical dimension of bhav distinguishes it from Heidegger's concept of Stimmung and connects it more closely to the practical philosophy of the Stoic and Epicurean traditions as analyzed by Pierre Hadot.

The political dimension of bhav is equally important for Mazhar's project. The person who has developed genuine bhav, who has transformed their mode of engagement with the world through the practices of the Fakiri tradition, is not merely spiritually transformed in a way that is relevant only to their inner life. Their transformation has immediate implications for their relationships with other people and for their participation in the life of their community. The fundamental equality of all human beings, regardless of caste, class, gender, or religion, which is one of the central ethical commitments of the Lalon tradition, is not merely a moral principle to which the follower of Lalon gives intellectual assent. It is a truth that has been realized through practice, that is lived in the concrete texture of daily existence, that shapes all of one's engagements with the social world.

This is why Mazhar insists that the Lalon tradition is not merely a spiritual tradition but a political one. The radical egalitarianism of the Baul and Fakiri traditions, their rejection of caste and class distinctions, their insistence on the equal dignity of all human beings, their practice of community across the boundaries that the dominant social order seeks to maintain: these are not peripheral features of the tradition but central to its philosophical and spiritual vision. The bhav that Lalon cultivates is not a bhav that enables withdrawal from the social world but a bhav that enables a different and more just form of engagement with it.

Mazhar's engagement with the Lalon tradition also involves a specific argument about the relationship between vernacular philosophy and the mainstream of Western academic philosophy, an argument that has important implications for the theory of knowledge and for the philosophy of science. The mainstream of Western academic philosophy has, for the most part, treated vernacular philosophical traditions, the philosophical wisdom embedded in the songs, stories, and practices of non-literate or only partially literate communities, as objects of anthropological or folkloric study rather than as genuine philosophical contributions. The implicit assumption is that genuine philosophy requires literacy, institutional support, systematic theoretical presentation, and engagement with the canonical texts of the philosophical tradition.

Mazhar challenges this assumption not merely by asserting that vernacular traditions like the Lalon tradition contain genuine philosophical wisdom, but by demonstrating through detailed

analysis that this wisdom is philosophically sophisticated, internally coherent, and capable of engaging productively with the theoretical resources of the Western tradition. This demonstration is itself a philosophical achievement, not merely a contribution to the sociology of knowledge or the anthropology of religion. It requires genuine philosophical work: the capacity to read Lalon's songs with philosophical attention, to identify the conceptual structures they employ and the philosophical positions they articulate, and to place those positions in dialogue with the resources of other traditions without distorting either.

The implications of Mazhar's engagement with the Lalon tradition for contemporary philosophy are significant. In an era when philosophy in Western academic institutions is increasingly dominated by narrow technical specialization and by the assumption that genuine philosophical work requires mastery of an ever-expanding literature of professional publications, Mazhar's project represents a challenge to these assumptions. It demonstrates that genuine philosophical insight can emerge from traditions that have nothing to do with academic philosophy, and that the task of the philosopher is not merely to engage with other professional philosophers but to engage with the fullest possible range of human attempts to understand the conditions of existence.

Contemporary developments in the philosophy of religion, in epistemology, and in social epistemology are, in their most interesting forms, moving in the direction that Mazhar has been pursuing for decades. The work of thinkers like Merold Westphal, William Desmond, and John Caputo in the philosophy of religion has rehabilitated the philosophical significance of religious experience and spiritual practice in ways that resonate with Mazhar's engagement with the Lalon tradition. The work of Miranda Fricker on epistemic injustice, and of Kristie Dotson and others on epistemic oppression, has developed theoretical frameworks for understanding how the exclusion of non-dominant knowledge traditions from the domain of legitimate knowledge is itself a form of injustice, a framework that supports Mazhar's insistence on the philosophical validity of the Lalon tradition.

CHAPTER TEN: JURISPRUDENCE, STATE THEORY, AND THE PROBLEM OF SOVEREIGNTY

The question of sovereignty, of who legitimately exercises political power, how that power is constituted, and on what basis it can be challenged or revoked, is one of the central questions of political philosophy and constitutional theory. It is also, as we have seen throughout this account of Mazhar's intellectual development, one of the central concerns of his intellectual project. This chapter examines Mazhar's engagement with the theoretical traditions of jurisprudence and state theory, and the distinctive constitutional theory that he has developed in response to the specific conditions of Bangladesh.

The Western tradition of political philosophy has produced several different approaches to the question of sovereignty. The social contract tradition, running from Hobbes through Locke and Rousseau to Rawls and Habermas, grounds political authority in an agreement, actual or hypothetical, among the individuals who are subject to it. The republican tradition, running from

the ancient republics through Machiavelli and Harrington to the American and French revolutionaries and contemporary theorists like Philip Pettit and Quentin Skinner, grounds legitimate authority in the capacity of the political system to prevent domination and to secure the conditions of genuine freedom for all citizens. The democratic tradition insists that legitimate authority must ultimately rest on the will of the people, expressed through free and fair elections and through the ongoing processes of democratic deliberation.

Each of these traditions has strengths and weaknesses, and none of them is fully adequate to the conditions of postcolonial societies like Bangladesh. The social contract tradition, in both its historical and its contemporary forms, tends to conceive of the contracting parties as abstract, culturally neutral individuals, ignoring the ways in which the conditions of colonial domination have shaped the cultural and material circumstances of the people who are supposed to be parties to the contract. The republican tradition, while more sensitive to the dangers of domination, has its historical roots in the political experience of the ancient city-states and the early modern European republics, and it needs significant adaptation to be applicable to the very different conditions of a postcolonial society with a largely rural population and a history of colonial institutional imposition.

The democratic tradition, while centrally important, is insufficient on its own precisely because the formal procedures of democratic governance, elections, parliamentary deliberation, constitutional amendment, can be and have been used to legitimate and entrench forms of domination that are genuinely undemocratic in their effects. This is a lesson that Bangladesh has learned repeatedly and painfully throughout its history, as successive governments have used the forms of democratic procedure to consolidate authoritarian power and to suppress the genuine political will of the people.

Mazhar's constitutional theory responds to the inadequacies of all of these traditions by returning to the fundamental concept of constituent power, the power of the people to constitute their own political order. As noted earlier in this chapter's discussion of the New York period, the concept of constituent power has a rich history in Western constitutional thought, from Sieyes through Schmitt and Arendt to Negri and Habermas. Mazhar's engagement with this tradition is both informed and critical: he draws on it to develop his own position while also subjecting it to critique from the perspective of the specific conditions of Bangladesh and from the perspective of the philosophical resources of the Bengali tradition.

The most important contemporary theorist of constituent power in relation to whom Mazhar's thought must be evaluated is Antonio Negri, the Italian Marxist philosopher whose work on constituent power, developed in his 1992 book *Il Potere Costituente* and subsequently elaborated in the trilogy written with Michael Hardt, *Empire*, *Multitude*, and *Commonwealth*, represents one of the most ambitious attempts to develop a radical democratic theory adequate to the conditions of contemporary global capitalism. Negri's concept of constituent power is grounded in his reading of Spinoza, and it conceives of constituent power as the immanent creative power of the multitude, the collective productive and political power of the people, that is always in excess of any specific constitutional form and that can never be finally captured or contained by any political institution.

Mazhar's constitutional theory shares important elements with Negri's approach: the insistence on the irreducibility of popular constituent power to any specific constitutional form, the critique of constitutional settlements that merely impose a framework on the people without genuinely expressing their will, and the demand for ongoing democratic self-constitution rather than the periodic reaffirmation of a fixed constitutional order. But there are also significant differences. Negri's theory is developed in the context of advanced capitalist societies in Western Europe and North America, and it draws primarily on the intellectual resources of the Western philosophical tradition. Mazhar's theory is developed in the context of Bangladesh, and it draws also on the resources of the Bengali philosophical tradition.

One of the most important differences is in their respective understandings of the people whose constituent power is in question. Negri's multitude is conceived primarily in relation to the conditions of post-Fordist capitalism, in terms of the new forms of immaterial and cooperative labor that characterize contemporary capitalist production. Mazhar's people, by contrast, are the actual people of Bangladesh, with all their cultural, religious, and ecological specificity: the farmers who maintain the biodiversity of the Bengal delta, the women who are the primary custodians of seed knowledge, the young people who came to the streets in 2024 to demand a genuinely new political order, the devotees who follow the Baul and Fakiri traditions.

The concept of jurisprudence that Mazhar engages with is also broader than the conventional understanding of the term in Anglo-American legal scholarship. In the dominant Anglo-American tradition, jurisprudence refers primarily to the philosophy of law: the study of the nature, sources, and validity of legal rules and legal systems. This is an important field of inquiry, but it tends to focus on formal legal systems and on the ways in which legal norms are created, interpreted, and applied by official institutions. Mazhar's concern with jurisprudence, while it includes this dimension, also extends to what might be called the jurisprudence of legitimacy: the question of what makes political authority genuinely legitimate, as opposed to merely formally valid.

This distinction between legitimacy and formal validity is crucial for Mazhar's constitutional theory. A constitutional system can be formally valid, in the sense that it was enacted by procedures that conform to the existing rules for constitutional creation or amendment, while being genuinely illegitimate, in the sense that it does not express the genuine will of the people whose political life it governs and does not serve their real interests and needs. Bangladesh's constitutional history is, in Mazhar's analysis, a history of this kind of gap between formal validity and genuine legitimacy. The 1972 constitution was formally enacted by a properly convened constituent assembly, but it was not genuinely the expression of the constituent power of the Bangladeshi people because that assembly was originally elected for the purpose of participating in the Pakistani constitutional process, not for the purpose of constituting a new Bangladeshi state.

This argument has important implications for the theory of legal and constitutional validity. It suggests that formal procedures for constitutional creation and amendment are not, by themselves, sufficient to confer genuine legitimacy on a constitutional order. Genuine legitimacy requires that the constitutional order actually express the will of the people, that it be the product of a genuine process of constituent power rather than merely of the exercise of constituted

political power. This requirement is not merely a technical legal requirement but a substantive political and philosophical one, and it cannot be satisfied simply by conforming to the formal requirements of the existing legal system.

The question of what constitutes a genuine expression of the people's constituent will is, of course, enormously complex and contested. Different traditions of constitutional theory give different answers. The liberal tradition tends to identify the people's will with the preferences of individuals as expressed through free and fair elections. The deliberative democratic tradition insists that genuine popular will must be the product of genuine deliberation, of a process in which all affected parties have the opportunity to present their views and to have those views taken seriously in the formation of collective decisions. The radical democratic tradition insists that genuine popular will can only be expressed through the direct political activity of the people themselves, not merely through representative institutions that claim to act in their name.

Mazhar's position incorporates elements of all of these traditions while being reducible to none of them. He insists on the importance of free and fair elections as a necessary condition of democratic governance, but he does not regard them as sufficient. He insists on the importance of genuine deliberation, of processes through which the people can engage with constitutional questions rather than simply having constitutional frameworks imposed on them by political parties and their leadership. And he insists on the importance of genuine popular engagement with the fundamental questions of political constitution, engagement that goes beyond the periodic exercise of the franchise.

His specific constitutional proposal for Bangladesh, developed in his 2023 book on mass uprising and constitution and subsequently elaborated in his public interventions in the debates following the 2024 uprising, involves the convening of a genuine constituent assembly, elected specifically for the purpose of drafting a new constitution, that would then be submitted to a referendum for ratification by the people. This proposal is, in its formal structure, not radically different from proposals that have been made by constitutional reformers in various countries. What is distinctive about Mazhar's version of the proposal is the philosophical framework within which it is embedded and the insistence that the constituent assembly process must be genuinely open to the participation and the wisdom of the rural majority, not merely a formal procedure conducted by political parties and their intellectual allies.

The relationship between constitutional theory and Islamic jurisprudence is also a dimension of Mazhar's intellectual engagement with questions of law and political authority. Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority country, and the question of the relationship between Islamic legal and political traditions and the secular constitutional framework of the modern state is an unavoidable one. The mainstream of Bangladeshi secular intellectuals has tended to treat this question by either ignoring it, treating the Islamic tradition as irrelevant to the constitutional question, or by treating it as a threat, seeing political Islam as inherently incompatible with democratic governance. Mazhar's approach is more nuanced and more philosophically sophisticated.

Mazhar does not accept the claim of political Islam, in its various Bangladeshi forms, that Islamic law provides a ready-made constitutional framework that should replace the secular constitution. He is deeply critical of the political use of Islamic symbols and arguments to justify

authoritarian governance and to suppress political opposition. But he also does not accept the secular nationalist position that the Islamic tradition has nothing to contribute to the constitutional debates of Bangladesh. He sees in the traditions of Islamic political thought, and particularly in the traditions of Islamic jurisprudence, including the classical concept of *maslaha*, or public interest, and the tradition of Islamic constitutional thought associated with thinkers like al-Mawardi and Ibn Khaldun, philosophical resources that can contribute to the development of a constitutional theory adequate to the conditions of Bangladesh.

The concept of *maslaha*, which holds that the legitimacy of legal and political arrangements must be evaluated in terms of their contribution to the genuine welfare of the community, is one that has important resonances with Mazhar's own constitutional theory. It insists that formal legal validity is not sufficient for genuine legitimacy and that the fundamental criterion of legitimacy is the promotion of the welfare of the people. This insistence connects the tradition of Islamic jurisprudence to the broader tradition of substantive theories of justice, from Aristotle's theory of the common good through the natural law tradition of Aquinas to the contemporary social justice theories of thinkers like Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum.

The theory of justice that underlies Mazhar's constitutional thought is, in its deep structure, a theory of capabilities: a theory that holds that the fundamental purpose of political institutions is to create and maintain the conditions under which all members of the community can develop and exercise their distinctive human capacities. This understanding is consonant not only with the natural law tradition but also with the Marxist tradition of the early manuscripts, with their concept of species-being as the ensemble of specifically human creative capacities, and with the Laloupe tradition's concept of the full human being who has realized their potential through the practices of *bhava*.

The three principles of constitutional order that Mazhar articulated in his 2025 address in Bogura, that the state cannot enact laws that undermine individual rights and dignity, that the state cannot adopt policies that harm life and the environment, and that the state cannot formulate policies that endanger the livelihoods of its citizens, represent a compressed formulation of this capabilities-based understanding of political legitimacy. Each of these three principles expresses a fundamental dimension of the claim that political institutions must serve the genuine welfare of the people, understood not merely as formal rights holders but as living, embodied beings who require specific material and cultural conditions to live well.

The relationship between these constitutional principles and the broader philosophical framework of Mazhar's thought is direct and significant. The first principle, prohibiting laws that undermine individual rights and dignity, expresses the Kantian dimension of his constitutional thinking: the insistence that every human being is an end in themselves and must never be treated merely as a means. The second principle, prohibiting policies that harm life and the environment, expresses the ecological dimension of his thinking: the insistence that the conditions of human life are inseparable from the conditions of the natural world and that any constitutional framework that ignores the ecological dimension of human existence is fundamentally deficient. The third principle, prohibiting policies that endanger livelihoods, expresses the Marxist dimension of his thinking: the insistence that formal political rights are meaningless without the material conditions that make their exercise possible.

The integration of these three dimensions, the Kantian, the ecological, and the Marxist, within a single constitutional framework is one of the most ambitious and original aspects of Mazhar's constitutional theory. It represents an attempt to develop a jurisprudence that is adequate to the full complexity of human life as it is actually lived, rather than reducing that complexity to any single dimension. This integration is possible, for Mazhar, because of the underlying philosophical framework provided by the Lalon tradition, which refuses the separations between the spiritual and the material, between the individual and the community, and between the human and the natural world, that prevent these three dimensions from being brought together.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE ABDUCTION, ARREST, AND THE COSTS OF RADICAL THOUGHT

No account of Farhad Mazhar's intellectual career is complete without attention to the personal costs that his intellectual and political commitments have extracted from him. The history of his encounters with state power, both direct and indirect, provides concrete evidence for the proposition that radical thought in Bangladesh is not merely an intellectual adventure but a genuinely dangerous undertaking.

The most dramatic of these encounters occurred in July of 2017, when Mazhar disappeared from his home in Dhaka's Shyamoli area under circumstances that remain contested and deeply disturbing. He had stepped out of his home early in the morning when, according to his subsequent account to the media, three men forced him into a minibus. His family immediately raised the alarm, his wife Farida Akhter, a distinguished activist and intellectual in her own right, filed a missing persons complaint and raised the issue with human rights organizations. The disappearance attracted significant national and international attention, with human rights organizations including Amnesty International calling for information about his whereabouts.

Mazhar was found several days later on a bus traveling from Khulna to Dhaka. He appeared confused and disoriented but was physically unharmed. A subsequent police investigation concluded that there was no evidence of kidnapping, a conclusion that Farida Akhter and Mazhar himself contested. The exact circumstances of the disappearance and the subsequent days remain unclear, and the conflicting accounts between Mazhar's own narrative and the police investigation conclusions have never been fully resolved.

The significance of this incident goes beyond the personal. In the context of Bangladesh's political culture in the 2010s, in which enforced disappearances were documented as a systematic practice of the security forces against political opponents, the disappearance of a prominent intellectual who had been a vocal critic of the government's political violence was not an isolated event. The pattern of enforced disappearances documented by human rights organizations in this period involved hundreds of individuals, many of them activists and opposition figures, who were disappeared by security forces and either never found or found dead. Against this background, Mazhar's disappearance, whatever its exact circumstances, was reasonably interpreted by many observers as part of the broader pattern of political repression.

The earlier arrest in 1995, for which Mazhar received international support from some of the most distinguished intellectual figures of the late twentieth century, including Nadine Gordimer, Jacques Derrida, and Mahasweta Devi, was another episode of state interference with his intellectual and political activities. The letter that these three figures wrote to the New York Times demanding his release and the restoration of his rights was a remarkable expression of international solidarity and a demonstration of the global significance of his intellectual work. That three figures of such different intellectual traditions and cultural backgrounds could unite in defending his right to intellectual freedom is itself a measure of the range and depth of his intellectual connections.

The willingness of Derrida to lend his name to this cause is particularly significant from a philosophical perspective. Derrida was, in the 1990s, one of the most celebrated and controversial figures in international philosophy, known for the development of deconstruction as both a philosophical method and a mode of textual analysis. His engagement with questions of justice, law, and the responsibility of the intellectual, articulated in works like *The Force of Law* and *Specters of Marx*, was directly relevant to the situation of Mazhar and to the broader question of intellectual freedom in postcolonial societies. The fact that Derrida saw in Mazhar's case a cause worthy of his support suggests that the Bangladeshi thinker's intellectual project was recognized by at least some of the most eminent figures in international philosophy as a genuine contribution to the shared intellectual enterprise of understanding justice, freedom, and the responsibilities of thought.

The relationship between intellectual freedom and the specific conditions of postcolonial states is a question that has received significant attention in contemporary political philosophy and in international law. The right to freedom of thought and expression, enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, is a formal legal norm that has, in theory, universal application. But the conditions under which this formal right is actually exercised vary enormously depending on the political, economic, and cultural conditions of specific societies. In societies like Bangladesh, where the state has historically been willing to use its coercive powers to suppress critical thought and where the economic conditions of intellectual production make genuine independence extremely difficult, the formal legal norm of freedom of thought and expression has a very different practical meaning than it does in advanced liberal democracies with well-established traditions of civil liberties and institutional checks on state power.

Mazhar's intellectual and personal response to these conditions of danger and constraint is itself philosophically significant. He has not sought safety through silence or through the adoption of less controversial intellectual positions. He has not limited himself to the kinds of criticism that are tolerable to the powerful because they operate within the framework of assumptions that the powerful share. He has continued, at considerable personal risk, to develop and articulate the most radical dimensions of his intellectual vision, precisely because he believes that the conditions of Bangladesh require radical thought and that the responsibility of the intellectual is to think as clearly and as honestly as possible about the realities of their situation, regardless of the personal consequences.

This commitment to intellectual honesty and intellectual courage, regardless of personal cost, is one of the most admirable features of Mazhar's intellectual character, and it is a feature that connects him to a long tradition of intellectual martyrs and witnesses whose willingness to speak truth to power, at whatever cost, represents one of the highest expressions of the human capacity for thought and for moral commitment. The tradition runs from Socrates through Giordano Bruno and Thomas More to Antonio Gramsci, who wrote his Prison Notebooks under the surveillance of Mussolini's censors, and to the countless intellectuals of the postcolonial world who have faced imprisonment, exile, and death for their commitment to honest thought.

CHAPTER TWELVE: THE 2024 MASS UPRISING AND THE VINDICATION OF A VISION

The mass uprising of 2024 in Bangladesh, which culminated in the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government on the fifth of August of that year, represented in many respects the vindication of intellectual positions that Mazhar had been developing and articulating for decades. The uprising, which began as a student movement against discriminatory job quotas and escalated into a general revolt against the authoritarian governance of the Awami League, was simultaneously a political event of enormous historical significance and a philosophical event: a moment in which the theoretical concepts that Mazhar had been developing, particularly the concept of constituent power and the insistence that the constitutional order of Bangladesh required fundamental transformation, became suddenly and urgently relevant to the political reality.

The influence of Mazhar's 2023 book on mass uprising and constitution, *Gono-ovyutthan o Gathan*, on the student leaders who led the uprising is documented and significant. The book's argument that the constitutional order of Bangladesh lacked genuine legitimacy because it had never expressed the genuine constituent power of the people, and that the creation of a genuinely new political order required not merely reform of the existing constitution but the convening of a genuine constituent assembly with the mandate to draft a new foundational document, provided the student movement with a theoretical framework that went beyond the specific demands about job quotas and addressed the fundamental question of the kind of political order that Bangladesh needed to become.

The aftermath of the uprising, however, also illustrated the gap between theoretical vision and political reality that has always been one of the central challenges of radical political thought. The interim government that was installed after Hasina's fall, led by the Nobel Prize-winning economist Muhammad Yunus, took its oath under the existing constitution and under the president who had been appointed by Hasina. Mazhar was among the most vocal critics of this decision, arguing that by taking oath under the existing constitutional framework, the new government had effectively preserved the political order that the uprising had sought to overturn rather than establishing the new order that the uprising had demanded.

This critique was not merely tactical but philosophical. The question of whether a government that takes power through the overthrow of an authoritarian regime can transform that regime

from within, using its institutional forms and legal frameworks to pursue genuinely radical change, or whether radical change requires a more fundamental break with the existing institutional order, is one of the oldest and most contested questions in radical political theory. Rosa Luxemburg's critique of reformism, Lenin's theory of the state as an instrument of class power that must be smashed rather than merely reformed, and Gramsci's more nuanced analysis of the conditions under which organic transformation of the state is possible, all represent different answers to this fundamental question.

Mazhar's position in this debate is closer to the revolutionary-constitutionalist position than to either the reformist or the vanguardist position. He is not arguing that the existing state must be violently smashed and replaced by a proletarian dictatorship. He is arguing that the existing constitution must be replaced by a new constitution that is the genuine expression of the constituent power of the people, through a process of democratic deliberation that goes beyond what any existing political party or constitutional institution can provide. This is a position that has respectable theoretical antecedents in the tradition of revolutionary constitutionalism, the tradition that runs from the American and French revolutionaries through Hannah Arendt's analysis of the revolutionary founding moment to contemporary theories of constitutional moments and popular sovereignty.

The specific form that Mazhar's constitutional vision took in the post-uprising debates, his proposal for a constituent assembly elected specifically for the purpose of drafting a new constitution, followed by a referendum in which the people would ratify or reject the proposed document, represents a specific instantiation of the broader principle of popular constituent power. It is a proposal that has been used in various forms in constitutional transitions around the world, from the post-apartheid constitution of South Africa, which was drafted through a process of extensive public participation and subsequently ratified by the Constitutional Assembly acting on behalf of the people, to the recent constitutional experiences of various Latin American countries, including Bolivia, Ecuador, and Chile, each of which has attempted, with varying degrees of success, to establish a constitutional framework that genuinely expresses the will of previously marginalized populations.

The Bolivian constitutional process of 2006 to 2009, which produced the current Bolivian constitution under the leadership of Evo Morales and the Movement for Socialism, is particularly relevant as a comparative reference point. The Bolivian constitution is notable for its recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and of Pachamama, Mother Earth, as a rights-bearing entity, a recognition that represents a fundamental departure from the liberal constitutional tradition's conception of rights as belonging exclusively to individual human beings. Mazhar's own constitutional principles, particularly the second principle prohibiting policies that harm life and the environment, resonate with this Bolivian recognition of ecological rights, and his broader philosophical commitment to the ecological dimensions of human existence connects his constitutional thought to the growing international movement for the recognition of the rights of nature and the rights of ecosystems.

The failure of the post-uprising political settlement to initiate a genuine constituent assembly process was, for Mazhar, a profound disappointment and a confirmation of his long-standing analysis of the structural barriers to genuine democratic transformation in Bangladesh. The

political parties, including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the newly formed National Citizen Party of the uprising's student leaders, the institutions of the existing state, and the international actors including India and the United States who have historically exercised significant influence over Bangladeshi political outcomes, all have interests in maintaining versions of the existing political order, even if they support selective reforms within it.

Mazhar's response to this situation has been characteristic: continued intellectual engagement, continued public advocacy, continued insistence on the full articulation of the radical constitutional vision, combined with a clear-eyed assessment of the political obstacles to its realization. He has not retreated into despair or into the kind of cynical disengagement that the gap between theoretical vision and political reality might seem to justify. He has continued to argue, as he argued at Rajshahi University in August of 2025, that the overemphasis on elections at the expense of genuine constitutional transformation risks rehabilitating precisely the forms of authoritarian politics that the uprising sought to overcome.

This argument, that democracy and fascism can arrive together when the form of democratic procedure is used to legitimate authoritarian substance, is one of the most prescient and important insights of Mazhar's political thought. It connects his analysis to the broader global crisis of liberal democracy that has been extensively analyzed in recent years by political theorists including Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, whose concept of competitive authoritarianism describes political systems that maintain the formal procedures of democracy while subverting its substantive content, and by Yascha Mounk, whose analysis of the separation of liberalism and democracy argues that contemporary populist movements around the world are exploiting this separation to establish illiberal democracies that are formally elected but that systematically undermine the rights and the political independence that genuine democracy requires.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE INTELLECTUAL LEGACY AND THE QUESTION OF INFLUENCE

The question of Farhad Mazhar's intellectual legacy and influence is a complex one that cannot be resolved by reference to the conventional indicators of academic influence: citation counts, institutional positions, or the volume of scholarly commentary generated by his work. Mazhar operates at the margins and across the boundaries of the institutions through which academic influence is measured, and his influence takes forms that these metrics cannot adequately capture.

His most direct influence has been through the generation of Bangladeshi intellectuals, writers, and activists who grew up reading his work and who have been shaped by his intellectual example. The distinctive combination of philosophical rigor, political commitment, ecological sensitivity, and spiritual openness that characterizes his intellectual work has produced a generation of Bangladeshi thinkers who approach the problems of their society with a depth and breadth of perspective that is directly traceable to Mazhar's influence. This influence has been most visible in the traditions of political journalism and public intellectual commentary in

Bangladesh, in the environmental and food sovereignty movements, and in the literary culture of contemporary Bangladeshi poetry.

His influence on the student movement of 2024, mediated primarily through his 2023 book on mass uprising and constitution, is another dimension of his intellectual legacy that is significant precisely because it demonstrates the capacity of theoretical work to have direct political effects. The fact that the theoretical framework developed in an academic book could influence the thinking of young activists who were risking their lives in the streets of Dhaka is a powerful demonstration of the kind of philosophy-as-practice that Mazhar has always advocated.

Internationally, Mazhar's influence has been most visible through the connections established by his work with UBINIG and the Nayakrishi Andolan, which have brought him into contact with the global networks of food sovereignty advocacy, ecological agriculture, and development alternative research. His contributions to the theoretical development of the food sovereignty concept have been recognized by organizations including La Via Campesina, the global network of peasant and farmer organizations that has been the primary driver of the food sovereignty agenda in international forums.

The recognition of his intellectual significance by Gayatri Spivak, whose acknowledgment of his influence in her 2012 Kyoto Prize lecture has been noted, also represents a form of international intellectual recognition that, while not translating into the conventional markers of academic fame, is significant in establishing his status as a thinker of global importance.

The question of how Mazhar's intellectual legacy will be received and developed by future generations of scholars and activists is one that cannot be answered with confidence. It depends on factors that are themselves unpredictable: the political evolution of Bangladesh, the development of global debates about food sovereignty, ecological rights, and constitutional democracy, and the broader evolution of postcolonial theory and philosophy in the decades ahead. What can be said with confidence is that his intellectual project represents a genuine contribution to the shared human enterprise of understanding the conditions of justice, freedom, and dignity, and that this contribution will remain relevant as long as the conditions that generated it, colonial inheritance, ecological crisis, the struggle for genuine popular sovereignty, and the tension between materialist analysis and spiritual experience, remain central to human life.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND THEIR APPLICATION: A SYNTHESIS

Having traced the intellectual formation of Farhad Mazhar through his biographical origins, his educational journey, his engagement with the theoretical traditions of Western Marxism and postcolonial thought, his philosophical rehabilitation of the Lalon tradition, his political activism through UBINIG and the Nayakrishi Andolan, his constitutional theory, and his engagement with the 2024 uprising, it is now possible to attempt a synthetic account of the theoretical framework that underlies his work as a whole.

The framework is organized around three fundamental commitments that run through all of Mazhar's intellectual work. The first is a commitment to what might be called relational ontology: the view that human beings, and all living things, are fundamentally relational beings, constituted by and through their relationships with other beings, with their natural environment, and with the broader structures of social and political life. This relational ontology is opposed to the atomistic individualism of liberal political philosophy, which conceives of the individual as a pre-social entity who enters into social relationships through voluntary agreement. For Mazhar, following both the Lalon tradition and certain strands of Marxist and feminist theory, the individual is always already constituted by relationships, and any adequate political philosophy must take this relational constitution of the self as its starting point.

The second fundamental commitment is to what might be called critical hermeneutics: the practice of engaging with received traditions, whether of Western philosophy, Marxist theory, Islamic jurisprudence, or Bengali folk philosophy, in a mode that is simultaneously faithful and critical, that seeks to recover the genuine insights of those traditions while subjecting their limitations and ideological distortions to rigorous critique. This practice of critical hermeneutics is itself a philosophical method, a way of relating to tradition that refuses both the simple rejection of tradition as mere superstition or ideology and the uncritical acceptance of tradition as authoritative truth. It requires both deep familiarity with the tradition being engaged and a capacity for independent critical judgment that can identify what within the tradition remains valuable and what must be challenged or transformed.

The third fundamental commitment is to what might be called practical universalism: the view that genuine universality, in ethics, in politics, and in epistemology, is not achieved by abstracting from the specific conditions of particular communities and traditions but by engaging deeply and honestly with those conditions and finding, within and through that engagement, the dimensions of insight and value that can speak across cultural and historical boundaries. This practical universalism is opposed both to cultural relativism, which denies the possibility of cross-cultural evaluation and judgment, and to abstract universalism, which achieves universality by imposing a single, culturally specific framework as the universal standard.

These three commitments, relational ontology, critical hermeneutics, and practical universalism, are not merely abstract philosophical positions. They are operative in every dimension of Mazhar's intellectual work. They shape his reading of Marx and his critique of orthodox Marxism. They shape his engagement with the Lalon tradition and his philosophical rehabilitation of *bhav* as a political concept. They shape his constitutional theory and his insistence on the importance of genuine popular constituent power. And they shape his work with UBINIG and the Nayakrishi Andolan, his insistence on engaging with the knowledge of rural communities as a genuine source of philosophical insight rather than merely as raw material for expert analysis.

The coherence of these three commitments across the full range of Mazhar's intellectual work is one of the strongest evidence for the claim that his work constitutes a genuine philosophical system, not merely a collection of disparate intellectual interests. The system is not articulated in a single systematic treatise. It is distributed across dozens of books, hundreds of articles and columns, and thousands of conversations and lectures. But it is coherent: each element of his

work illuminates and is illuminated by the others, and the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

The relationship of this system to the dominant currents of contemporary philosophy, in both Western and non-Western institutional contexts, is complex. In many respects, Mazhar's thought is ahead of the field in which it operates. The relational ontology that he has been developing since the 1980s, grounded partly in his reading of Marx and partly in his engagement with the Lalon tradition, anticipates developments in contemporary philosophy of mind and social ontology that have received increasing academic attention in the 2000s and 2010s. The critical hermeneutics that he practices has resonances with the hermeneutical philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, as well as with the more recent tradition of global philosophy that seeks to bring non-Western philosophical traditions into genuine dialogue with Western thought. And the practical universalism that he advocates has affinities with the approach developed, in the context of development economics and capability theory, by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum.

But Mazhar's thought also challenges and pushes beyond these dominant currents. His insistence on the philosophical significance of the Lalon tradition, his refusal to treat Bengali folk philosophy as merely a cultural phenomenon rather than a genuine philosophical resource, and his development of the concept of bhav as a political-philosophical category all represent contributions that have no precise parallel in any tradition of academic philosophy. They represent, in other words, a genuinely original philosophical achievement, one that cannot be adequately understood by assimilating it to any existing tradition but that must be engaged with on its own terms.

CONCLUDING NOTE TO PART ONE: THE MAKING OF A RADICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Part One of this textbook has traced the intellectual formation of Farhad Mazhar from his birth in the divided landscape of Noakhali in 1947 to his emergence in the 2020s as the most significant and most controversial intellectual voice in Bangladesh's ongoing constitutional crisis. It has attempted to do justice to the full complexity of his intellectual project by situating it in relation to the biographical, historical, and theoretical contexts from which it emerged and within which it must be understood.

What emerges from this account is the portrait of an intellectual who has, throughout his career, refused the comfortable intellectual options available to someone of his gifts and his formation. He could have been an orthodox Marxist, applying a ready-made theoretical framework to the analysis of Bangladeshi society. He could have been a postcolonial theorist in the academic sense, translating Bengali cultural traditions into the theoretical vocabulary of Western cultural studies. He could have been a liberal constitutionalist, advocating for institutional reforms within the existing framework of Bangladeshi political life. He could have been a spiritual teacher, working exclusively within the tradition of Lalon and the Bauls. He chose none of these options. He chose instead the harder path of developing a genuinely original intellectual framework, one

that draws on all of these traditions while being reducible to none of them, one that speaks to the specific conditions of Bangladesh while aspiring to the kind of practical universality that can speak across cultural and historical boundaries.

This choice has cost him significantly. It has made him controversial, difficult to categorize, and therefore easy to dismiss. It has brought him into conflict with every established power in Bangladeshi society, with the state, with the orthodox left, with the Islamic establishment, and with the secular intelligentsia. It has resulted in his arrest, his disappearance under disturbing circumstances, and the continuous suspicion with which established institutions regard his work. And it has meant that his influence, though real and significant, has operated through channels and in forms that are less visible and less easily measured than the influence of intellectuals who work within established institutional frameworks.

But it has also produced an intellectual achievement of genuine significance and genuine originality. Farhad Mazhar has spent more than five decades developing a philosophical and political vision that takes seriously the full complexity of human life as it is actually lived in the Bengal delta: the material conditions of exploitation and poverty, the cultural and spiritual traditions that sustain human dignity in the face of those conditions, the ecological relationships between human communities and their natural environment, and the political structures that either support or undermine the capacity of communities to be the genuine authors of their own collective life.

The seven remaining parts of this textbook will examine the specific dimensions of this vision in greater detail: his poetry and its philosophical significance, his agricultural activism and the theory of food sovereignty, his constitutional theory and its relationship to the global debates about popular sovereignty and constitutional democracy, his engagement with Islamic thought and its political implications, his theory of the postcolonial state and its critique, his relationship to the global left and its various traditions, and finally, his significance for the future of Bangladesh and for the broader intellectual traditions within which his work is situated.

Part One has established the foundations. The intellectual formation traced in these chapters is the foundation on which all of Mazhar's subsequent work rests, and understanding it is essential for understanding the work itself. The child of Noakhali who entered the world in the week that his country was being torn apart has spent his intellectual life trying to understand how human communities can constitute themselves on foundations of justice, equality, and genuine freedom. Whether that project will ultimately succeed, either in its specific Bangladeshi context or in its broader philosophical ambitions, is a question that the subsequent parts of this textbook will pursue with the seriousness it deserves.

What Part One has demonstrated, at least, is that the project is a genuine one, grounded in real philosophical insight, sustained by moral courage, and expressed through intellectual work of the highest order. Farhad Mazhar may be, as many of his critics charge, a controversial figure who holds positions that are easy to dispute and hard to pin down. But he is also, as his most serious readers recognize, one of the most significant and most original intellectual voices to have emerged from Bangladesh, and indeed from the broader postcolonial world, in the past half century. Understanding his thought in its full depth and complexity is not merely an academic

exercise. It is an intellectual obligation for anyone who takes seriously the questions of justice, freedom, dignity, and the possibility of genuine human emancipation that his work so persistently and so courageously raises.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC AND THEORETICAL NOTES FOR PART ONE

The theoretical frameworks engaged in Part One draw on a range of traditions in political philosophy, constitutional theory, postcolonial studies, philosophy of religion, and political economy. The following notes identify some of the key theoretical reference points and suggest directions for further reading.

On constituent power and constitutional theory, the essential theoretical texts include Emmanuel Sieyès's *What is the Third Estate?* (1789), Carl Schmitt's *Constitutional Theory* (1928), Hannah Arendt's *On Revolution* (1963), and Antonio Negri's *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* (1999, English translation). More recent engagements with constituent power theory include works by Emiliós Christodoulidis, Martin Loughlin, and Neil Walker, collected in *The Paradox of Constitutionalism: Constituent Power and Constitutional Form* (2007). The relationship between constituent power and postcolonial constitutional experiences is examined in Rajeev Bhargava's edited collection *Politics and Ethics of the Indian Constitution* (2008) and in a growing literature on comparative constitutionalism in the Global South.

On Western Marxism and the philosophical dimensions of Marx's thought, the essential texts include Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (written 1929 to 1935), the Frankfurt School's work, and particularly Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944). Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) and *Eros and Civilization* (1955) represent his synthesis of Marx and Freud. For the early Marx, the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* remain essential, along with the *Grundrisse* (written 1857 to 1858).

On postcolonial theory, the foundational texts include Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994), and Gayatri Spivak's *In Other Worlds* (1987) and *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999). For the specific context of South Asian postcolonial thought, the Subaltern Studies project, associated with Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, and others, provides essential background.

On the philosophy of Fakir Lalon Shah and the Baul tradition, the scholarly literature includes Carol Salomon's translation and commentary on Baul songs, Jeanne Openshaw's *Seeking Bauls of Bengal* (2002), and the more recent philosophical engagement in the *Daily Star* essay on Mazhar and Lalon published in September 2025.

On food sovereignty and the politics of seeds and agricultural biodiversity, Vandana Shiva's *Monocultures of the Mind* (1993) provides important theoretical background, as does Philip McMichael's analysis of the global food regime in *Food Regimes and Agrarian Questions*

(2013). UBINIG's own research publications provide the most direct access to the specific framework developed through Mazhar's activism.

On epistemology and epistemic justice, Miranda Fricker's *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (2007) and more recent work by Kristie Dotson provide the key theoretical frameworks. The growing literature on global philosophy and on the inclusion of non-Western philosophical traditions in the philosophical canon provides important background for understanding the significance of Mazhar's project of philosophical rehabilitation of the Lalon tradition.

On the specific constitutional and political context of Bangladesh since 2024, the constitutional reform debates are documented extensively in *The Daily Star*, *The Business Standard*, and *bdnews24*, whose coverage of Mazhar's interventions in these debates provides the primary source material for Part One's account of his recent constitutional advocacy.

End of Part One. Part Two will examine Farhad Mazhar's poetic work in detail, analyzing the philosophical dimensions of his major collections and situating his poetic achievement within the broader traditions of Bengali literature and of philosophical poetry in world literature.

PART TWO: THE WORD AS WEAPON, THE SONG AS SYSTEM

Farhad Mazhar's Poetics, His Literary Philosophy, the Lalon Encounter, and the Architecture of a Radical Aesthetics

PROLOGUE TO PART TWO: WHY THE POETRY COMES FIRST

There is a temptation, when studying Farhad Mazhar as an intellectual phenomenon, to treat his poetry as the decorative framing around a philosophical and political argument that could, in principle, be stated in prose alone. This temptation must be resisted absolutely. It is not merely wrong; it is a fundamental misreading of what Mazhar is doing and of why he does it in the form he does. The poetry is not the frame. The poetry is the thing itself, or rather, it is one of the primary modes through which the thing itself is constituted, explored, and communicated. To understand the philosophy without understanding the poetry is like trying to understand a river by studying only its geological bed without ever watching the water move.

This distinction matters for reasons that go well beyond the merely personal or biographical. Mazhar's insistence on poetry as a primary mode of philosophical engagement is itself a philosophical position, one that has profound implications for epistemology, for the theory of language, and for the politics of knowledge in postcolonial societies. When Mazhar writes a poem rather than an essay, he is not merely choosing between two equivalent modes of

expression. He is making a claim about what kinds of knowledge are possible, what kinds of truth can be reached through poetic rather than discursive means, and whose forms of knowledge are legitimate and whose are not.

The claim, stated baldly, is this: there are dimensions of human experience, of political reality, of spiritual truth, and of the relationship between human beings and their world, that prose argument cannot adequately reach. Not because the truth is ineffable or beyond language, but because the kind of language that discursive prose employs, with its requirement for sequential logical argument, its privileging of propositional over performative meaning, its aspiration to a kind of context-free universality, is the wrong instrument for the job. Poetry, with its capacity to hold multiple meanings simultaneously, to enact rather than merely describe, to work through sound and rhythm as well as through semantic content, to exploit the ambiguity and multivalence of language rather than trying to eliminate it, is in certain respects a more powerful cognitive instrument than prose.

This is not a novel claim in the history of philosophy. It was understood by Plato, who was sufficiently anxious about it to ban the poets from his republic. It was articulated, in different ways, by the German Romantics, particularly by Schiller and Holderlin, who saw in poetry a mode of access to truth that the analytic reason of Enlightenment philosophy had foreclosed. It was implicit in Heidegger's later work, in his sustained attention to the language of poets like Holderlin and Rilke as a resource for philosophical thinking about Being and its concealment. And it is a central presupposition of the Bengali philosophical-poetic tradition running from the Vaishnava padavali through the Baul and Fakiri songs to Tagore and his successors.

Mazhar's specific contribution to this tradition is to have brought the question of poetic knowledge into explicit dialogue with the questions of political philosophy, jurisprudence, and social theory that animate his broader intellectual project. For Mazhar, the question of what can be known through poetry and what can only be known through poetry is not a purely aesthetic question; it is a political question, because the forms of knowledge that count as legitimate in a given society are always also forms of power, and the exclusion of poetic knowledge from the domain of serious truth-claiming is always also the exclusion of certain communities and certain traditions from the domain of political legitimacy.

Part Two of this textbook is organized around this central claim. It examines Mazhar's poetry in its formal and thematic dimensions, analyzes the philosophical framework that informs his poetic practice, investigates the relationship between his poetry and the traditions he draws on, particularly the Lalon tradition and the tradition of Islamic devotional poetry, and considers the political and jurisprudential implications of his poetic philosophy. It also examines the controversies that his poetry has generated and the significance of those controversies for understanding the political landscape of Bangladeshi intellectual life.

CHAPTER ONE: THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHICAL POETRY IN BENGAL: THE TRADITION MAZHAR INHERITS

To understand Farhad Mazhar's poetic achievement, one must first understand the tradition within which he works and against which he defines himself. Bengali poetry has a history of more than a thousand years, and it is a history in which the boundary between the poetic and the philosophical has always been porous, in which the greatest poets have also been the most serious thinkers, and in which the deepest thinking has often been done in verse rather than in prose. This is not merely a historical accident; it reflects something fundamental about the epistemological assumptions of the Bengali cultural tradition, assumptions that are deeply at odds with the separation of reason and imagination, of philosophy and literature, that the Western academic tradition has largely taken for granted since Descartes.

The earliest significant body of Bengali poetry is the Charyapada, a collection of Buddhist mystical songs composed between the eighth and twelfth centuries by Sahajiya yogis associated with the Vajrayana tradition. The word Charyapada means songs of practice or songs of conduct, and the designation is revealing: these are not merely aesthetic objects but practical texts, songs whose purpose is to guide the singer and the listener through transformative spiritual and psychological experiences. The Charyapada songs are composed in what linguists call Old Bengali, the earliest form of the language that can be identified as distinctly Bengali rather than Sanskrit or Prakrit, and they are among the founding texts of Bengali literary history.

The philosophical content of the Charyapada is sophisticated and complex, engaging with Vajrayana Buddhist metaphysics, with the concept of the nature of mind, with the relationship between emptiness and form, with the practices through which the ordinary confused mind can be transformed into the awakened mind of the bodhisattva. But this philosophical content is not presented in the form of systematic treatises or logical arguments. It is presented in the form of songs that use the imagery of everyday life, the imagery of fishing and weaving and the natural landscape of the Bengal delta, to point toward truths that cannot be stated directly. The Charyapada songs are riddling, allusive, multivalent, deliberately resistant to single definitive interpretation. They demand a certain kind of reading, a reading that is simultaneously attentive to the surface meaning and alert to the deeper layers of significance that the surface meaning conceals and reveals.

This tradition of deliberately multivalent philosophical-poetic language, of poetry that uses the ordinary to point toward the extraordinary, of verse that is simultaneously a practical guide and a philosophical argument, was inherited and developed by the major subsequent traditions of Bengali devotional poetry. The Vaishnava padavali tradition, which flourished from the fourteenth century onward and which includes some of the most beautiful lyric poetry ever written in any language, continued the Charyapada tradition's commitment to the use of sensuous and erotic imagery to express spiritual truths, developing the metaphor of the love between Krishna and Radha as an image of the soul's longing for divine union. The greatest poets of this tradition, including Chandidas, Vidyapati, and Govindadas, were simultaneously lyric poets of extraordinary sensibility and philosophical thinkers whose songs encoded a sophisticated understanding of the nature of consciousness, of desire, of the relationship between the human and the divine.

The Baul and Fakiri tradition, which emerged in the Bengal delta from roughly the fifteenth century onward and which reached its greatest expression in the songs of Lalon Shah Fakir in the

nineteenth century, continued and deepened this tradition of philosophical-poetic engagement. But it added a dimension that the Vaishnava tradition, for all its beauty, had partially suppressed: a dimension of explicit social and political critique. The Baul and Fakiri songs did not merely express spiritual longing; they challenged the social order, rejected the hierarchies of caste and religion, insisted on the equal dignity of all human beings regardless of their birth or their formal religious affiliation, and developed, through the medium of song and the practice of community, a genuinely alternative vision of what human social life could look like.

The tradition of Bengali modernist poetry, which emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under the enormous influence of Rabindranath Tagore, represented in certain respects a departure from this tradition of philosophical-devotional poetry. Tagore was, in many ways, the poet who most successfully translated the insights of the classical Bengali tradition into a form accessible to the educated modern Bengali reader, and in doing so he inevitably transformed those insights, giving them a more individualist, more romantic, and in certain respects more aestheticist coloring. The Tagore who was celebrated internationally, who was translated into European languages and who won the Nobel Prize in 1913, was a figure who could be assimilated to the tradition of European Romantic poetry in ways that made him more comprehensible to European audiences but that also involved a significant simplification of the complexity and radicalism of the Bengali tradition from which he emerged.

The post-partition generations of Bengali poets, both in India and in what became Bangladesh, faced the challenge of continuing and developing a tradition that had been disrupted by the catastrophic events of partition, the creation of two separate Bengali literary traditions separated by national and religious boundaries, and the encounter with the global modernist movements that were reshaping literary production everywhere in the mid-twentieth century. The poets who emerged in East Pakistan in the 1950s and 1960s were navigating between the legacy of Tagore, which they could not simply reject, the political imperatives of the Bengali nationalist struggle, and the formal innovations of international modernism.

Farhad Mazhar entered this landscape in the late 1960s and early 1970s with a set of ambitions and a set of resources that were unusual in the context of his generation. He was drawing on the Western Marxist tradition and on the philosophical resources of the Frankfurt School and of critical theory. He was drawing on the Bengali tradition of philosophical-devotional poetry in ways that went beyond the merely decorative or nostalgic. He was drawing on the tradition of Islamic devotional and mystical poetry, which had its own rich history in the Bengal delta through the Sufi tradition. And he was drawing on his own experience of exile and return, his encounter with New York and with the intellectual life of the New School, his witness to the Liberation War and its aftermath.

The combination of these resources produced, over the subsequent decades, a body of poetic work that is distinctively Mazhar's: work that cannot be easily placed in any existing category of Bengali poetry, that challenges the assumptions of the secular leftist tradition as much as it challenges the assumptions of the religious traditionalists, and that has established what one critic has rightly described as almost a new school of poetry.

CHAPTER TWO: EBADATNAMA: A BOOK OF DEVOTIONS AS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

The publication of Ebadatnama, which translates roughly as Book of Devotions or Book of Acts of Worship, represents one of the most significant moments in the history of contemporary Bangladeshi poetry. The collection challenged, in a single stroke, most of the comfortable assumptions of the Bangladeshi literary establishment: the assumption that serious poetry must be secular, that religious language is either sincere devotion or cynical obscurantism but cannot be the vehicle for radical political thought, that Marxism and Islamic spiritual practice are inherently incompatible, and that the proper mode of a political poet writing in a Muslim-majority postcolonial country is either secular humanism or revolutionary materialism.

Ebadatnama does none of these things. It enters, boldly and with extraordinary literary skill, into the tradition of Islamic devotional poetry, using the forms and the language and the imagery of that tradition while simultaneously transforming them from within. The title itself signals this double move: ebadatnama, the book of devotional acts, is a recognized genre of Islamic literary culture, one with a long history in Persian, Arabic, Urdu, and Bengali literature. By using this genre title for his collection, Mazhar positions himself within a recognized tradition while also claiming the right to redefine what that tradition means and what it can contain.

The strategy of Ebadatnama is, in this respect, analogous to the strategy that the Baul and Fakiri tradition had always used: the strategy of working within a recognized cultural form while subverting its conventional content, of using the language of devotion to express a critique of the institutions of religion, of turning the forms of spiritual submission into vehicles for the assertion of human dignity and political resistance. But Mazhar's execution of this strategy in Ebadatnama is distinctively modern, drawing on the resources of twentieth-century poetic technique, on the traditions of irony and paradox developed in the context of modernist poetry, on the philosophical vocabulary of critical theory, in ways that the Baul tradition could not have anticipated.

The poem in which Mazhar tells God that he is glad the Quran did not come in Bengali, because otherwise God would have become too vain in the face of the beauty of the language, is perhaps the most famous and the most controversially received poem in the collection. The poem operates on multiple levels simultaneously. At the surface level, it is a bold and irreverent address to the divine, the kind of address that, in the orthodox tradition, would be considered blasphemy. But at a deeper level, it is a sophisticated argument about the relationship between language, beauty, and the sacred, an argument that draws on and engages with the tradition of Islamic aesthetics, which has always been alert to the question of the relationship between the beauty of the Quran and the beauty of human language, while also making a claim for the particular beauty and dignity of the Bengali language against the implicit hierarchy of classical Islamic culture, which privileges Arabic as the language of revelation.

This double operation, the surface irreverence and the deeper philosophical seriousness, is characteristic of Mazhar's poetic method in Ebadatnama. He is not simply being provocative for the sake of provocation, nor is he genuinely disrespectful of the religious tradition he is engaging with. He is using the tools of poetic language, irony, paradox, the deliberate cultivation of

multiple simultaneous meanings, to explore questions about religion, language, beauty, and political power that cannot be addressed adequately from within the orthodox tradition or from outside it. He is, in the fullest sense of the phrase, thinking through his poetry.

The political dimension of Ebadatnama is visible throughout the collection, but it operates primarily through implication and suggestion rather than through direct political statement. This is not evasion; it is a deliberate poetic strategy, one that is grounded in Mazhar's understanding of how political poetry works most effectively. Direct political statement in poetry tends to reduce the poem to a vehicle for a predetermined message, to subordinate the full complexity of poetic language to the single, clear meaning that political statement requires. Mazhar's political poetry works differently: it creates in the reader a condition of heightened awareness, a state of what might be called political bhav, in which the reader's understanding of the relationship between the spiritual and the political, between devotion and resistance, between the sacred and the social, is transformed.

The theological controversy that Ebadatnama generated is itself philosophically significant. The fact that a collection of poems could be simultaneously regarded as deeply Islamic by some readers and as dangerously blasphemous by others is evidence of the richness and complexity of the collection, of its capacity to hold multiple and contradictory meanings in productive tension. But it is also evidence of the political stakes involved in the question of who gets to define what Islam is and what Islamic poetry can say. Mazhar's challenge, in Ebadatnama, is not merely an aesthetic challenge. It is a challenge to the authority of the established religious and political institutions to determine the boundaries of legitimate Islamic expression.

The label of Communist Mullah that was applied to Mazhar by his critics in response to Ebadatnama and his subsequent work captures something real about the specific configuration of positions he occupies, even if the label itself is intended as a dismissal rather than as a description. Mazhar does combine commitments that are conventionally regarded as incompatible: a commitment to Marxist political economy and its critique of capitalism, and a commitment to Islamic spiritual practice and to the philosophical resources of the Islamic tradition. But the dismissive label of Communist Mullah misses the point that the combination is not merely an eclectic mixing of incompatible elements but a genuine philosophical synthesis, one that requires genuine intellectual work to sustain and that produces original insights that neither Marxism alone nor Islamic tradition alone could generate.

The theoretical framework that makes this synthesis possible is, broadly speaking, the same framework that Mazhar finds in the Lalon tradition: a relational ontology that refuses the sharp separation between the material and the spiritual, between the political and the religious, between the economic and the cultural. If human beings are fundamentally relational beings, constituted by and through their relationships with each other, with their natural environment, and with whatever they understand to be the source of existence and meaning, then the sharp lines that modern thought has drawn between the economic, the political, the cultural, and the spiritual are artificial and distorting. The great mystical and devotional traditions of Bengal, including both the Sufi tradition and the Baul tradition, had always understood this, and Mazhar's project is to make this understanding available as a resource for contemporary political thought.

The specific form of Islamic thought that Mazhar engages with in *Ebadatnama* and in his subsequent writings is not the political Islam of the Jamaat-e-Islami or other Bangladeshi Islamist movements, which grounds its politics in a literalist reading of Islamic law and in the aspiration to establish an Islamic state. It is, rather, the tradition of Islamic mysticism and philosophical spirituality, the tradition associated with figures like al-Hallaj, Ibn Arabi, Rumi, and in the Bengal context with the Sufi missionaries and teachers who brought Islam to the Bengal delta. This tradition, sometimes called *tasawwuf* or Islamic mysticism, has a complex relationship to Islamic orthodoxy: it is simultaneously part of the Islamic tradition and in tension with its orthodox institutional expressions, simultaneously committed to the fundamental truths of Islam and suspicious of the institutional religion that claims to represent those truths.

Mazhar's engagement with Islamic mysticism is not uncritical. He is aware of the ways in which the mystical tradition can be used to depoliticize religion, to redirect the energy of social discontent into individual spiritual seeking rather than collective political action. But he finds in the mystical tradition, and particularly in its Bengali expressions, resources for thinking about the relationship between spiritual experience and political transformation that the orthodox tradition lacks. The Sufi concept of *fana*, the annihilation of the ego in the divine, is not, in Mazhar's reading, a retreat from the political world into a private mystical experience. It is the condition of possibility for genuine political engagement, because it is only through the dissolution of the ego's narrow self-interest that genuine solidarity with others becomes possible.

This reading of Islamic mysticism in political terms is itself a contribution to the tradition of Islamic political thought, and it is one that has resonances with developments in contemporary Islamic philosophy that Mazhar could not have anticipated when he began his work. The turn in contemporary Islamic political thought toward resources within the Islamic tradition that support democratic governance, human rights, and social justice, a turn associated with thinkers like Mohamed Arkoun, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, and Abdolkarim Soroush, has opened up a space in which Mazhar's synthesis of Islamic spirituality and radical political thought is not merely a personal idiosyncrasy but a contribution to a broader intellectual movement.

CHAPTER THREE: THE FORMAL ARCHITECTURE OF MAZHAR'S POETRY

Any serious literary analysis of Mazhar's poetry must attend to its formal dimensions: to the specific poetic forms he employs, to his use of sound and rhythm, to his deployment of imagery, to his management of the relationship between the spoken and the written dimensions of poetic language. These formal dimensions are not separable from the philosophical and political content of his poems; they are constitutive of that content, part of the way in which the poems make their meaning rather than merely expressing a meaning that could be made without them.

Mazhar's formal range is considerable. He writes in both traditional and modernist forms, using the *ghazal*, the *sufi qasida*, and the folk song form alongside free verse and experimental forms that draw on the techniques of international modernist poetry. This range is not mere eclecticism; it reflects a coherent understanding of the relationship between form and content, the

understanding that the choice of form is itself a semantic act, a choice that carries meaning and that must be made deliberately rather than arbitrarily.

The ghazal, which Mazhar employs in several of his collections, is a form with deep roots in the Arabic, Persian, and Urdu literary traditions, and its use in Bengali has a long history associated primarily with the Sufi tradition. The ghazal is a lyric form consisting of rhymed couplets, each of which is semantically complete in itself while also contributing to the cumulative effect of the whole poem. The final couplet, the *maktaa*, traditionally includes the poet's pen name, a self-referential gesture that both draws attention to the poem's constructed character and asserts the poet's presence in the poem. The ghazal's characteristic formal feature, the tension between the semantic independence of each couplet and the thematic unity of the whole poem, creates an aesthetic experience that is specifically poetic: an experience of meaning that is constituted through the accumulation of distinct moments rather than through the unfolding of a continuous logical argument.

Mazhar's use of the ghazal is informed by this understanding of the form's specific capacities. In his ghazals, each couplet is a complete thought, a complete image, or a complete argument that stands on its own while also contributing to a cumulative philosophical or political statement. The disjunctions between couplets, the spaces of silence between distinct moments of meaning, are themselves meaningful: they enact at the formal level the argument that Mazhar is making at the content level, the argument that meaning is constituted through relationship and through the encounter between distinct and not always easily reconcilable perspectives, rather than through the smooth unfolding of a single logically determined line of thought.

The influence of the Baul song form on Mazhar's poetry is equally important and equally deliberate. The Baul song, which is inseparable from its musical setting and from the performance traditions that surround it, uses specific rhythmic and melodic structures to create the conditions for the kind of transformative experience that the Baul philosophy describes. The repetition of a melodic phrase, the call and response structure between the singer and the audience, the use of specific rhythmic patterns associated with particular emotional or spiritual states: all of these features of the Baul musical tradition have left their traces in Mazhar's poetry, even when the poetry is conceived primarily as a written rather than a performed text.

This is not a simple case of a modern poet borrowing the external features of a folk form for literary effect. It is a much more philosophically serious engagement, one that is grounded in Mazhar's theoretical understanding of the relationship between form, performance, and philosophical content in the Baul tradition. For Mazhar, following his deep engagement with the songs of Lalou and with the living practices of the Baul and Fakiri communities, the song form is not merely a vehicle for philosophical content; it is itself a philosophical practice, a way of engaging the body and the emotions as well as the intellect in the process of philosophical reflection and transformation. When he incorporates elements of the Baul song form into his poetry, he is attempting to make available, even in the limited medium of the written text, some of the transformative potential of that form.

The use of paradox and apparent contradiction is another formal feature of Mazhar's poetry that is directly connected to his philosophical commitments. Paradox, in the sense of a statement that

appears logically contradictory but that points toward a truth that cannot be stated without contradiction, is a fundamental rhetorical and epistemological device in both the Baul and Sufi traditions. The paradoxes of Lalon's songs, which speak of the man within the mind who cannot be seen or grasped but who is more real than anything visible, of the cage bird who is more free than the bird outside the cage, of the teacher who teaches by not teaching, are not merely rhetorical flourishes or deliberate obscurantism. They are attempts to use the resources of language to point toward forms of experience that language, in its ordinary propositional mode, cannot capture.

Mazhar inherits and extends this tradition of philosophical paradox. His poems are full of statements that appear contradictory at the surface level but that make profound sense at a deeper level of engagement. The poem that tells God he is glad the Quran did not come in Bengali is paradoxical in this way: it is simultaneously an act of reverence toward the Quran and an assertion of the dignity of the Bengali language, and neither of these dimensions can be reduced to the other. The poem holds both in tension, and it is precisely the tension that generates the poem's meaning.

The relationship between sound and sense in Mazhar's poetry is also worth examining in some detail. Bengali is a language of extraordinary sonic richness, with a complex system of vowel and consonant gradations that create possibilities for onomatopoeia, assonance, and alliteration that are different from but equal in their richness to the sonic possibilities of any European language. Mazhar exploits these sonic possibilities with considerable skill, creating in many of his poems an auditory dimension that reinforces and deepens the semantic content. The rhythmic patterns of his verse are not arbitrary; they are chosen to create specific affective and cognitive experiences that support the philosophical arguments the poems are making.

This attention to the sonic dimension of poetry connects Mazhar's work to the tradition of oral performance that is central to both the Baul and the Sufi traditions, traditions in which the poem is inseparable from its musical setting and in which the affective and cognitive effects of the music are considered as important as the meanings conveyed by the words. This connection is philosophically significant because it supports the argument that the body's response to sound and rhythm is not merely an incidental accompaniment to the poem's semantic meaning but is itself a form of knowing, a way in which the poem communicates truths that propositional language cannot reach.

CHAPTER FOUR: MONER MANUSH: THE PHILOSOPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF LALON'S KEY CONCEPT

Central to Mazhar's philosophical project is his sustained engagement with Lalon's concept of the Moner Manush, the man within the mind, or more precisely, the person who dwells in the heart, a concept that is at once the central ontological, epistemological, and ethical concept of the Lalon philosophical tradition and one that resists translation into the terms of any Western philosophical tradition with remarkable stubbornness. It is worth devoting a substantial chapter to this concept and to Mazhar's philosophical elaboration of it, because it is here, in this

sustained engagement with a concept that has no Western equivalent, that Mazhar's most original philosophical contribution is to be found.

The concept of the Moner Manush appears throughout Lalon's songs in different forms and with shifting emphases, but certain features are consistent. The Moner Manush is not identical with the empirical self, the self that is known through the ordinary experiences of daily life and through the categories of social identity: gender, caste, religion, profession, family. It is something deeper than these surface identities, something that underlies and sustains them while not being reducible to any of them. It is also not the atman of the Hindu philosophical tradition, the immortal individual soul that is identical with Brahman, the universal ground of being; nor is it the nafs of the Islamic tradition, the self that must be purified and disciplined through spiritual practice. It is something that borrows elements from both of these traditions while being identical with neither.

The Moner Manush is, in Mazhar's reading, best understood as the aspect of the human being that is capable of genuine freedom, genuine love, and genuine knowledge. It is not a supernatural entity or a metaphysical substance floating above the material world; it is, rather, a potential that exists in every human being and that can be cultivated through practice, through the disciplines of the Fakiri tradition, through genuine engagement with other human beings in relationships of care and solidarity. The cultivation of the Moner Manush is not a retreat from the social and political world but a deepening of one's engagement with it, because it is only from the perspective of the Moner Manush that one can see through the social constructions and the ideological mystifications that prevent genuine understanding and genuine solidarity.

The concept of the Moner Manush as Mazhar develops it is deeply anti-essentialist in certain respects. It is not a fixed, determinate nature or essence that the human being possesses but a capacity, a potentiality, a way of being that must be continuously cultivated and that can be lost if the cultivation ceases. It is also relational: the Moner Manush is not a monadic individual substance but a form of relating, a mode of being-with-others that constitutes rather than merely expressing the self. This anti-essentialist and relational character of the concept connects it to certain strands of contemporary philosophy, particularly to the tradition of process philosophy associated with Whitehead and, in more recent continental philosophy, to the work of thinkers like Jean-Luc Nancy, whose concept of being-singular-plural attempts to articulate a form of selfhood that is constituted through its relationships with others rather than preceding and entering into those relationships.

Mazhar's encounter with Heidegger in the context of his engagement with Lalon is one of the most philosophically productive moments in his intellectual career, and it deserves careful analysis. Heidegger's fundamental philosophical project, the project of working out the question of Being, *das Sein*, as distinct from the question of beings, *das Seiende*, the things that exist, is one of the most influential and most contested philosophical projects of the twentieth century. Heidegger argues that the history of Western philosophy since Plato has been characterized by a fundamental forgetfulness of the question of Being, a tendency to focus exclusively on beings, on the things that exist, while ignoring the more fundamental question of what it means for anything to be at all. This forgetfulness, which Heidegger calls the ontological difference, the

difference between Being and beings, is the deepest source of the nihilism and the technological domination of nature that characterize modern Western civilization.

The resonance between this Heideggerian project and Lalon's concept of the *odhora*, the ungraspable or the ever-elusive, is striking and philosophically significant. The *odhora* in Lalon's songs is precisely that which cannot be grasped by ordinary knowing, which eludes all the categories and instruments of conventional understanding, but which is nevertheless the most real and most important dimension of existence. The *odhora* is not a thing that exists alongside other things; it is the ground of all things, the condition of possibility of all existence, that which makes it possible for anything to be at all. In this respect, the *odhora* and Heidegger's Being are engaged with the same fundamental philosophical question: the question of the ground of existence, the question of what it means for anything to be.

But Mazhar, following Lalon, does not leave the *odhora* as a purely metaphysical concept. The *odhora* has ethical and political dimensions that Heidegger's Being does not obviously possess. The cultivation of awareness of the *odhora*, the practice of relating to the ever-elusive ground of existence rather than being absorbed entirely in the world of beings and things, is not merely a philosophical exercise; it is a practical transformation of the self and of one's relationships with others. The person who has developed genuine awareness of the *odhora* is, in Lalon's understanding, incapable of the kinds of exploitation, domination, and cruelty that characterize human social life when it is organized around the narrow self-interest of the ego. This is because the awareness of the *odhora* dissolves the sharp boundary between self and other that makes exploitation possible; it reveals the fundamental solidarity of all beings in the ground of existence from which they all emerge.

This connection between ontological awareness and ethical transformation is one of the features of Lalon's philosophy that Mazhar finds most significant and most politically productive. It suggests that political transformation cannot be achieved through institutional change alone, through changes in economic structures or political systems, without corresponding changes in the forms of consciousness and the modes of relating that characterize the people who inhabit those institutions. This is a position that has resonances with Marx's own early analysis of alienation and its overcoming, with the argument that genuine liberation requires not merely a change in external conditions but a transformation of the mode of human self-constitution. But Lalon's version of this argument is more concrete and more practically oriented than Marx's version: it is embedded in specific practices, specific disciplines, specific forms of community, rather than remaining at the level of philosophical analysis.

The concept of *bartoman*, which Mazhar finds in Lalon's songs and which he translates as the living present or the presentness of the present, is another key concept in his philosophical engagement with the Lalon tradition. *Bartoman* is not simply time in the ordinary sense of the succession of moments. It is a quality of attention, a mode of being in time, that involves full presence to the current moment rather than living primarily in the past or in anticipation of the future. This concept of the living present is philosophically rich and politically significant: it is a critique of all forms of politics and ideology that sacrifice the present generation for a future that may never arrive, and it is an affirmation of the value of the actual, concrete lives of actual, concrete people in the present moment.

The resonance between bartoman and recent philosophical discussions of temporal experience and the phenomenology of time is significant. Edmund Husserl's analysis of time-consciousness in his *Lectures on the Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, and Heidegger's subsequent development of an ontological analysis of temporality in *Being and Time*, had established the philosophical importance of the present moment and its relationship to retention and protention, to the just-past and the about-to-come, as fundamental features of human temporal experience. But Lalon's bartoman is not primarily a phenomenological concept; it is an ethical and political one. It is a call to full engagement with the actual conditions of the present rather than a retreat into nostalgia for a past that is idealized or into fantasies about a future that has not yet arrived.

Mazhar's deployment of bartoman as a political concept is one of the most original aspects of his political philosophy. He uses it as a criterion for evaluating political programs and ideological commitments: does this program, does this commitment, honor the actual lives and the actual experience of people in the present, or does it sacrifice the present to some abstract future goal? This is a question that cuts across all the conventional political divisions of Bangladeshi political life. It challenges the secular nationalist tradition, which tends to organize itself around a mythologized past, the Liberation War of 1971 and its supposed ideals, while ignoring the ways in which the present reality falls short of those ideals. It challenges the Marxist tradition, which tends to organize itself around a projected future, the classless society that will be achieved after the revolution, while devaluing the actual experience of people in the present. And it challenges the Islamic political tradition, which tends to organize itself around either a mythologized past, the time of the Prophet and the early caliphate, or a projected future, the establishment of the Islamic state, while ignoring the actual spiritual and political needs of people in the present.

CHAPTER FIVE: BHAKTI AND BHAV: MAZHAR'S CRUCIAL PHILOSOPHICAL DISTINCTION

One of Mazhar's most important and most carefully worked-out philosophical contributions is his systematic distinction between bhakti and bhav, two concepts that are often conflated in the scholarly literature on Bengali devotional traditions but that represent, in Mazhar's analysis, fundamentally different and in certain respects opposed philosophical orientations. Understanding this distinction is essential for understanding the political and philosophical project of Mazhar's engagement with the Lalon tradition, and it is also essential for understanding the specific form of his critique of existing political and religious traditions in Bangladesh.

Bhakti, which is usually translated as devotion or loving devotion to a personal deity, is the central concept of the Hindu devotional movements that swept across India from roughly the sixth century onward and that achieved their greatest expression in the traditions of Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and the devotion to various forms of the goddess. The bhakti movements were, in many respects, genuinely radical: they challenged the Brahminical caste hierarchy by insisting that the divine could be reached through direct personal devotion regardless of caste or gender, and they produced a democratic religious culture that was accessible to people at all levels of the

social hierarchy. The greatest bhakti saints, including Kabir, Mirabai, Tukaram, and in the Bengali context Chandidas and Chaitanya, were figures who drew their inspiration from the lower castes and who used the vernacular languages of their regions rather than the Sanskrit of the Brahminical tradition.

But bhakti also has its limitations and its dangers. Its characteristic orientation is toward a personal deity who is conceived as existing outside and above the devotee, toward whom the devotee stands in a relationship of love and longing. This theistic orientation, while it has produced extraordinary religious poetry and genuine experiences of spiritual transformation, also tends to reproduce a hierarchical structure at the heart of the spiritual life: the structure of the superior deity and the inferior devotee, the commander and the commanded, the source of all grace and the passive recipient. This hierarchical structure, Mazhar argues following his reading of Lalon, can easily be transferred from the spiritual to the political domain, producing a political theology that justifies the authority of political leaders, religious scholars, and social elites on the model of the divine authority of God.

Bhav, by contrast, as Mazhar develops this concept from the Lalon tradition and from his analysis of the Nadia school of Bengali philosophy associated with Nityananda, the companion of Sri Chaitanya, is not primarily a relationship between a devotee and a deity. It is a mode of being in the world, a way of relating to all aspects of existence, that is characterized by a specific quality of awareness and engagement. The person who has cultivated genuine bhav does not relate to the world from the position of a needy ego seeking satisfaction or a sinful soul seeking redemption. They relate to the world from a position of fundamental fullness and openness, from a condition of what Lalon calls *ananda*, which is not merely pleasure or happiness but the joy of being that is available when the ego's cramped and fearful mode of relating has been dissolved.

The distinction between bhakti and bhav maps, in certain respects, onto the distinction between what Mazhar calls the discourse of rights and the discourse of responsibility and obligation. Bhakti, as a model of spiritual life, reproduces the logic of the discourse of rights: there is a sovereign who possesses authority and who distributes grace or punishment, and there are subjects who receive what the sovereign distributes. The devotee, in the bhakti model, is defined primarily by what they lack and what they seek from the divine, just as the rights-holder is defined primarily by what they are entitled to claim from the state or from other individuals. Bhav, by contrast, reproduces the logic of the discourse of responsibility and obligation, in which the fundamental relationship is not between a needy subject and a sovereign provider but between beings who are constituted by their obligations to each other and to the natural world from which they emerge and upon which they depend.

This distinction has immediate and radical political implications. A politics grounded in bhav, in the mode of being that Lalon cultivates and that Mazhar attempts to articulate in his poetry and his theoretical writings, is not a politics of rights-claims directed at a sovereign state but a politics of solidarity and mutual obligation directed at the transformation of the relations through which community life is constituted. It is not primarily a politics of what people are entitled to receive but of what people are capable of giving to each other and to the natural world that sustains them. This does not mean that the discourse of rights is irrelevant or that formal legal rights are unimportant. It means that rights, understood as the specific entitlements of individuals

against the state or against each other, are insufficient as a foundation for genuine political community, and that the recovery of a politics of obligation and solidarity, grounded in a transformed mode of being-with-others, is necessary for any genuinely transformative political project.

The philosophical tradition that Mazhar draws on in developing this argument is not exclusively the Lalon tradition. He also draws on the tradition of Islamic jurisprudence, and particularly on the concept of khalifa, which in Islamic political thought refers to the vicegerent or representative of God on earth, the one who bears responsibility for the care and stewardship of the creation. In orthodox Islamic political theology, the khalifa is the political leader, the caliph, who exercises sovereign authority on behalf of God. But Mazhar draws on a different reading of the concept, one associated with certain traditions of Islamic spiritual thought, in which khalifa is not a political office but a spiritual condition available to every human being: the condition of one who has cultivated the awareness and the willingness to take on the responsibility of care for the creation as a whole.

The concept of khalifa in this reading is close to the concept of bhav: it is a mode of being in the world characterized by a sense of fundamental responsibility for and solidarity with all beings, a sense that one's own existence is not an end in itself but a participation in a larger community of life. This concept of spiritual responsibility, of the human being as a steward or caretaker of the creation rather than its owner or exploiter, has direct implications for environmental politics and for the critique of the capitalist model of infinite growth and resource extraction. Mazhar's engagement with environmental and agricultural issues through UBINIG and the Nayakrishi Andolan is not separable from this philosophical and spiritual framework; it is its practical expression.

CHAPTER SIX: THE NADIYA SCHOOL AND THE REVOLUTIONARY BHAV MOVEMENT

One of the most distinctive features of Mazhar's philosophical project is his sustained engagement with what he calls the Nadiya school of Bengali philosophy, associated with the city of Nadia in what is now West Bengal, which was the center of a remarkable spiritual and philosophical movement in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The movement was initiated by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, a spiritual visionary who revolutionized the Vaishnava tradition of devotion to Krishna, and by his associates, among whom Nityananda occupies a particularly important role in Mazhar's analysis.

The Chaitanya movement, also known as the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement, is well known in its subsequent forms through its global spread by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the Hare Krishna movement founded by Swami Prabhupada in the twentieth century. But this global spread has involved a significant transformation and in certain respects a domestication of what the original movement represented: a transformation that Mazhar's philosophical reading of Nityananda is designed to challenge and to reverse.

Mazhar's central argument about the Nadia school is that the movement initiated by Chaitanya and Nityananda was not primarily a religious movement in the conventional sense, a movement aimed at intensifying devotion to Krishna and spreading the Vaishnava tradition. It was, or it contained within itself the seeds of, a genuinely revolutionary political movement, a movement aimed at the dissolution of caste hierarchy, at the affirmation of the equal dignity of all human beings regardless of their birth, and at the establishment of a form of community in which the fundamental relations were not relations of domination and subordination but relations of love, care, and mutual obligation.

The revolutionary dimension of the original Nadia movement was, in Mazhar's analysis, primarily associated not with Chaitanya but with Nityananda, his companion and co-initiator. While Chaitanya himself was a figure of extraordinary spiritual charisma and philosophical depth, his movement as it was institutionalized by his followers tended toward the mystical and the devotional, toward an intensification of inner spiritual experience that, whatever its spiritual value, did not necessarily translate into social and political transformation. Nityananda, by contrast, was associated with the practice of outreach to the most marginalized and excluded members of Bengali society, to the untouchables and the outcastes, the people who were most completely excluded from the social order and its structures of dignity and recognition.

Mazhar's reading of Nityananda as the initiator of the revolutionary bhav movement is a philosophical and historical argument, not merely a spiritual one. He is arguing that the practice of reaching out to the excluded, of insisting on their equal humanity and their equal capacity for spiritual experience, is not merely an act of compassion but a fundamental ontological claim: a claim that the prevailing social order is grounded in a fundamental lie, the lie that some human beings are inherently more valuable or more spiritually capable than others. The bhav movement in Mazhar's reading is the movement that sees through this lie and practices, in concrete relationships and concrete communities, the equal dignity that the dominant social order denies.

This reading of the Nadia school has obvious implications for contemporary politics. The insistence on the equal dignity of all human beings, regardless of their position in the social hierarchy, is not merely a moral principle but a political demand: the demand for the dismantling of all the social, economic, and political structures that enforce inequality and that deny to some human beings the recognition and the material conditions of life that they are entitled to as human beings. This demand is, in Mazhar's analysis, the deepest political meaning of the Lalon tradition, which inherits and extends the revolutionary bhav movement of the Nadia school.

The connection between the Nadia school and the subsequent development of the Baul and Fakiri traditions in Bengal is one of the most important arguments in Mazhar's historical and philosophical analysis. He argues that the radical egalitarianism of the Nityananda tradition did not disappear with the institutionalization of the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement but was preserved and extended in the folk philosophical traditions of the Bengal delta, in the songs and practices of the Bauls and Fakirs who were the spiritual descendants of the Nadia revolutionaries. This argument has important implications for the historical understanding of the Baul tradition and its relationship to the institutional religious traditions of Bengal, and it has been both celebrated and contested by scholars of Bengali religious history.

The contestation is itself philosophically significant. The mainstream of academic scholarship on the Baul tradition has tended to treat it primarily as a religious and cultural phenomenon, a folk tradition with its own internal history and its own internal dynamics, rather than as the continuation of a philosophical-political movement with roots in the Nadia revolution of the sixteenth century. Mazhar's reading, by locating the Baul tradition in this longer philosophical and political history, gives it a different significance and a different political weight. It transforms the Baul from a picturesque folk singer into a figure who is participating, often unknowingly, in a philosophical and political project that goes back five centuries and that has implications for the present.

The relationship between Mazhar's reading of the Nadia school and his constitutional theory is not immediately obvious, but it is real and important. The revolutionary bhav movement, in Mazhar's analysis, was a movement that insisted on the capacity of all human beings to participate in the life of the community as full and equal members, regardless of their birth and regardless of their position in the existing social hierarchy. This insistence is, in philosophical terms, an insistence on the equal constituent power of all members of the community: the equal right and equal capacity of all human beings to participate in the constitution of the social and political order under which they live. The bhav movement was not a movement for the reform of the existing social order but for its fundamental reconstitution on the basis of the equal dignity of all its members. This is exactly the kind of reconstitution that Mazhar demands in the constitutional domain: not the reform of the existing constitutional order but its replacement by a new order that genuinely expresses the constituent power of the people in all their diversity.

CHAPTER SEVEN: RABINDRA READING AND THE CRITIQUE OF CULTURAL NATIONALISM

Mazhar's book *Rakter Daag* *Muse Rabindrapath*, which translates as *Reading Tagore by Wiping Away the Bloodstain*, is one of the most provocative and most significant of his literary-critical works, and it deserves sustained attention as an example of his method of critical hermeneutics applied to the most sacred object of Bengali cultural nationalism. Tagore, as the greatest Bengali writer and the first Asian Nobel Laureate, occupies a position in Bengali cultural life that is virtually beyond criticism in the conventional discourse of both Bangladeshi and Indian Bengali nationalism. He is not merely a great poet; he is the symbol of Bengali cultural identity itself, the figure around whom the collective self-understanding of Bengali-speaking people is organized.

Mazhar's reading of Tagore challenges this cultural nationalist appropriation without denying Tagore's genuine greatness as a poet and thinker. The bloodstain of the title is the blood of the victims of political violence, specifically the victims of the Bangladeshi state's political repression, and the argument of the book is that the cultural nationalist appropriation of Tagore has been used to legitimate precisely the kinds of political violence and social exclusion that Tagore's own deepest commitments would have led him to oppose. By reading Tagore through the lens of the actual political conditions of Bangladesh, by refusing the sanitized and politically convenient version of Tagore that the cultural nationalist tradition has constructed, Mazhar is

attempting to recover a Tagore who is more complex, more contradictory, and more genuinely radical than the Tagore of the official memory.

The method of this reading is itself philosophically significant. Mazhar approaches Tagore not as an object of reverence to be celebrated but as a philosophical interlocutor to be engaged in genuine dialogue. He asks what Tagore's actual philosophical positions were, how those positions were formed and what their limitations were, what resources his work contains for thinking about the political conditions of present-day Bangladesh, and where those resources are insufficient or where they require critical supplementation. This is a form of reading that treats the canonical author with genuine respect, the respect of taking their work seriously enough to subject it to rigorous critical analysis, rather than the false respect of uncritical celebration that actually empties the work of its critical potential.

One of the central arguments of Mazhar's Tagore reading is that Tagore's relationship to the traditions of the Bengal delta, and particularly to the Baul and Fakiri traditions, was more complex and more ambivalent than either his admirers or his critics have recognized. Tagore was genuinely influenced by the Baul tradition; its themes and images appear throughout his work, and his engagement with Lalon's songs was one of the significant intellectual and artistic encounters of his life. But Tagore's engagement with the Baul tradition was also shaped by his position as an educated, upper-caste Bengali who encountered the tradition as an outsider and who inevitably translated its insights into terms more accessible to and more comfortable for his own class and cultural background.

This is not a simple accusation of bad faith or cultural appropriation. It is a more nuanced argument about the conditions under which cross-class and cross-cultural intellectual encounters occur and about the inevitable transformations that occur in such encounters. Tagore's Baul, the Baul of his songs and his essays, is a more aesthetically refined and less politically radical figure than the actual Bauls and Fakirs of the Bengal delta; a figure whose radical egalitarianism and whose challenge to the caste hierarchy have been partially domesticated by their translation into the aesthetic vocabulary of Bengali literary modernism. Mazhar's reading of Tagore is partly an attempt to recover, beneath the aesthetic refinement, the more radical political and philosophical content of the tradition that Tagore was engaging with.

The relationship between Mazhar's critique of Tagore and his broader critique of the secular Bengali nationalist tradition is direct. The secular nationalist tradition in Bangladesh, associated primarily with the Awami League and its intellectual allies, has organized its cultural politics around Tagore as the symbol of a pure and inclusive Bengali cultural identity that transcends the divisions of religion and class. This cultural politics has served important political functions, particularly in the context of the struggle against Pakistani cultural nationalism, which sought to suppress Bengali cultural identity and to impose Urdu as the national language. But it has also served to naturalize the cultural authority of the educated, secular, upper-class Bengali who is presumed to be the proper custodian of this cultural heritage, while marginalizing the very different cultural traditions, including the Baul and Fakiri traditions, of the rural majority.

Mazhar's challenge to the cultural nationalist use of Tagore is therefore simultaneously a literary-critical argument, a political argument, and a class argument. It is an insistence that the cultural

politics of Bangladesh cannot be organized around the preferences and the self-understanding of an educated urban elite without doing violence to the cultural reality of the vast majority of the Bangladeshi people.

CHAPTER EIGHT: MARX, FOUCAULT, AND ROOHANIATH: THE QUESTION OF POLITICAL SPIRITUALITY

Mazhar's book *Marx, Foucault O Roohaniath*, *Marx, Foucault and Spirituality*, represents perhaps the most explicit attempt in his published work to articulate the theoretical synthesis that underlies his entire intellectual project. The book brings together the two most important theoretical traditions of his Western intellectual formation, the Marxist tradition and the Foucauldian tradition, and places them in dialogue with the concept of roohaniath, spirituality, that he finds in the Islamic philosophical tradition and in the Lalon tradition.

The encounter with Foucault is one of the most significant theoretical developments of Mazhar's mature intellectual career. Michel Foucault's philosophy, with its analysis of power as a diffuse and productive force that operates through discursive formations and through the disciplinary regimes that produce specific kinds of subjects, offered Mazhar a set of analytical tools that Marx's political economy, focused primarily on the economic dimensions of exploitation, could not provide. Foucault's concept of power-knowledge, the argument that knowledge is always embedded in and productive of relations of power rather than being the neutral discovery of pre-existing truths, was directly relevant to Mazhar's analysis of the politics of knowledge in postcolonial Bangladesh and to his critique of the epistemological assumptions of the development establishment.

But Mazhar's engagement with Foucault is also critical. He finds in Foucault's analysis a sophistication and a richness that orthodox Marxism lacks, particularly in Foucault's attention to the micro-politics of everyday life and to the ways in which power operates through the constitution of subjects rather than merely through the prohibition or the enforcement of specific behaviors. But he also finds in Foucault a certain philosophical nihilism, a tendency to dissolve all normative claims and all positive visions of human emancipation in the acid of genealogical critique, that he regards as politically paralyzing and philosophically insufficient.

The concept that Mazhar focuses on in his engagement with Foucault is the concept of political spirituality, which Foucault developed in his analysis of the Iranian Revolution of 1979. In a series of controversial essays written for an Italian newspaper during and after the Iranian Revolution, Foucault argued that the revolution represented something unprecedented in modern political experience: a genuine uprising of an entire people motivated not by the class interests that Marxist analysis would predict but by something that Foucault called political spirituality, a collective spiritual experience that transformed ordinary people into political actors willing to risk their lives for a vision of a different kind of society. Foucault's analysis was deeply controversial, criticized by feminists and by many on the left for its apparent celebration of a revolution that would subsequently establish a deeply oppressive theocratic regime.

Mazhar's engagement with Foucault's concept of political spirituality is characteristically both engaged and critical. He finds in the concept a recognition of something real and important: the fact that political mobilization in many postcolonial societies, including Bangladesh, cannot be understood through the categories of rational self-interest or class consciousness alone, but requires an understanding of the spiritual and cultural dimensions of political experience. The mass uprising of 2024 in Bangladesh, with its extraordinary mix of political demands, cultural assertion, and something that can only be described as a collective spiritual transformation of the protesters' sense of themselves and their possibilities, is exactly the kind of political phenomenon that Foucault's concept of political spirituality is designed to illuminate.

But Mazhar also argues that Foucault's concept of political spirituality, developed in the context of a specific analysis of the Iranian Revolution, is insufficiently developed to do the theoretical work that Mazhar needs it to do. Foucault's analysis remains at the level of description and genealogy; it identifies the phenomenon of political spirituality but does not develop a normative framework for distinguishing between different forms of political spirituality, between the political spirituality of liberation and the political spirituality of oppression. This normative framework, Mazhar argues, must be sought in the philosophical traditions themselves, in the tradition of Islamic spiritual thought and in the tradition of the Bengal delta, rather than in the genealogical analysis that Foucault provides.

The key term in Mazhar's synthesis of Marx, Foucault, and roohaniath is the phrase from the early Marx that he identifies as the key to understanding both the critique of alienation and the positive vision of human emancipation: the phrase practical, human sensuous relationship, which Marx uses in the 1844 Manuscripts to describe the kind of engagement with the world and with other people that is characteristic of genuinely human, non-alienated existence. This phrase, Mazhar argues, is the key that unlocks the connection between Marx's critique of capitalism, Foucault's analysis of power and the constitution of subjects, and the tradition of Islamic and Bengali spiritual philosophy.

The practical, human sensuous relationship is not the relationship of the abstract rational individual with a world of objects to be known and manipulated. It is the relationship of a fully embodied, fully engaged human being with a world that is simultaneously natural, social, cultural, and spiritual, a world that the human being does not merely know and use but in which they participate, to which they are responsible, and from which they derive the forms of meaning and connection that constitute their existence as genuinely human beings. This concept, Mazhar argues, is the point at which Marxist humanism, Foucauldian analysis of the formation of subjects, and the spiritual philosophy of the Lalon tradition all converge, and it is the foundation on which a genuinely transformative political philosophy adequate to the conditions of postcolonial Bangladesh can be built.

CHAPTER NINE: THE POLITICS OF THE ANSAR REBELLION ARTICLE AND THE 1995 ARREST

The 1995 arrest of Farhad Mazhar was triggered by the publication of an article in the Bengali magazine *Chinta*, which Mazhar himself edited and which was one of the primary vehicles for his intellectual and political interventions in the early 1990s. The article, titled *The Ansar Rebellion*, analyzed the 1994 uprising of the Bangladesh Ansar paramilitary force, whose members had gone on strike and engaged in a rebellion demanding better working conditions and more equitable treatment. The government's response to the Ansar rebellion had been to deploy another paramilitary force, the Bangladesh Rifles, to suppress it by force, resulting in deaths and injuries among the Ansar members.

Mazhar's article in *Chinta* analyzed this episode not merely as a labor dispute but as a symptom of the structural violence of the Bangladeshi state, of the ways in which the state uses force not merely against external enemies or criminal elements but against its own employees when they assert their rights and their dignity. The article was written in Mazhar's characteristic style: analytically rigorous, politically committed, philosophically dense, and completely unwilling to make the kind of accommodations to the sensitivities of the powerful that would have made it easier to ignore.

The government's response was to arrest Mazhar and to charge him with offenses under provisions of Bangladeshi law that criminalized the publication of material deemed to be subversive or likely to incite public unrest. This response was itself a demonstration of the analysis Mazhar had been making: a government that arrests a writer for analyzing state violence is a government that uses law not as a mechanism for justice but as a mechanism of political control. The arrest transformed Mazhar, at least temporarily, from a controversial intellectual into a political prisoner, and it drew international attention to the conditions of intellectual freedom in Bangladesh.

The response of Nadine Gordimer, Jacques Derrida, and Mahasweta Devi to the arrest, their joint letter to the *New York Times* demanding Mazhar's release and the restoration of his rights, is worth examining in some detail for what it reveals about the international recognition of his significance and about the connections between his intellectual project and broader global traditions of intellectual resistance.

Nadine Gordimer, the South African novelist and Nobel Laureate, was writing from the experience of apartheid, of a state that had also used law as a mechanism of political control to suppress the expression of truth about its own violence. Her solidarity with Mazhar was grounded in a shared experience of what it means to write honestly under conditions of political repression, and in a shared understanding that the freedom of the writer is not a trivial or merely personal freedom but a condition of the possibility of genuine political community.

Jacques Derrida, the French philosopher of deconstruction, was at this point in his career deeply engaged with questions of justice, of the relationship between law and justice, and of the responsibility of the intellectual to bear witness to injustice. His 1994 essay *Specters of Marx*, in which he had engaged with the legacy of Marx and with the question of what it means to inherit a philosophical tradition, had established his commitment to a form of political engagement that was inseparable from rigorous philosophical reflection. His support for Mazhar expressed this same commitment: a recognition that the persecution of a thinker who is asking serious

philosophical questions about justice and political power is itself a philosophical problem as well as a political one.

Mahasweta Devi, the Bengali novelist and activist, was perhaps the most directly connected to Mazhar's specific intellectual context among the three signatories. Her own work, which documented the condition of the most marginalized communities of India, the tribal peoples and the Dalits who had been systematically exploited and dispossessed by both colonial and postcolonial states, was concerned with many of the same questions that animated Mazhar's work. Her support for him was an expression of solidarity within a shared project of giving voice to the experiences of those who had been excluded from the official histories and the dominant cultural narratives.

The fact that these three very different figures, a South African novelist, a French philosopher, and an Indian Bengali novelist and activist, united in support of a Bangladeshi intellectual whose work the mainstream of international scholarship had largely ignored, is itself a philosophical statement about the nature of intellectual community and about the universality of the struggle for intellectual freedom. It suggests that Mazhar's work, despite its deep rootedness in the specific conditions of Bangladesh, speaks to concerns and raises questions that are genuinely universal.

The legal dimension of the 1995 case deserves attention in the context of our broader analysis of Mazhar's engagement with jurisprudential questions. The charges brought against him were grounded in provisions of Bangladeshi law that were themselves inheritances from the colonial period: provisions that had been enacted by the British colonial administration to suppress Indian nationalist movements and that had been retained, with modifications, by successive post-independence governments in both Pakistan and Bangladesh. The use of colonial-era sedition and public order provisions against a writer who has published a political analysis of state violence is a paradigmatic example of the phenomenon that critical legal scholars have called the weaponization of law, the use of formally valid legal provisions to achieve political purposes that are fundamentally unjust.

The concept of the weaponization of law has been extensively analyzed in critical legal studies, a movement of legal scholarship associated with figures like Duncan Kennedy, Roberto Unger, and Catharine MacKinnon, which developed in the 1970s and 1980s and which sought to expose the ways in which apparently neutral legal rules and principles serve to legitimate and reproduce existing structures of social and political power. Mazhar's case is a textbook example of this phenomenon: the legal provisions used against him were formally valid, but their application to the act of writing and publishing a political analysis of state violence was an exercise in political censorship dressed in the language of legal order.

The broader jurisprudential question raised by the case is the question of the relationship between freedom of expression and the rule of law. The standard liberal position, articulated most clearly by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*, holds that freedom of expression is a fundamental prerequisite of both individual development and social progress, that ideas must be free to compete in the marketplace of ideas, and that the state's power to suppress speech should be limited to speech that constitutes a direct and immediate incitement to harmful action. On this

liberal analysis, Mazhar's article, which was a political analysis rather than a direct incitement to any specific action, should clearly have been protected speech.

But the Bangladeshi government's position implicitly invoked a different conception of the relationship between law and political speech, a conception that treated the stability of the existing political order as a value that could legitimately override the individual right to free expression when speech was deemed to threaten that stability. This conception has a long and inglorious history in both colonial and postcolonial states, where the authority of the state has frequently been used to suppress precisely the kinds of critical analysis that are necessary for genuine democratic governance.

CHAPTER TEN: THE POETICS OF DECOLONIZATION: LANGUAGE, POWER, AND THE POLITICS OF FORM

Mazhar's poetic practice is inseparable from his theory of decolonization, from his understanding of how the legacies of colonial domination continue to operate in the cultural and intellectual life of postcolonial Bangladesh. One of the most insidious legacies of colonialism, in Mazhar's analysis, is the transformation of the epistemic landscape: the replacement of the diverse and sophisticated knowledge traditions of the colonized with a single, privileged mode of knowing grounded in the assumptions and the methods of European Enlightenment rationalism. This epistemic colonization did not end with the formal transfer of political sovereignty in 1947; it continued in the institutional and cultural forms of the postcolonial state, which adopted the epistemological assumptions of colonial modernity as its own.

The politics of language is central to this analysis of epistemic colonization. Language is not merely a medium for the expression of pre-existing thoughts and meanings; it is a structure that shapes what can be thought and what can be said, that determines the categories available for organizing experience, and that carries within it the specific assumptions and the specific power relations of the cultural tradition in which it developed. The imposition of colonial languages, first English and to some extent Arabic and Persian, on colonized peoples was therefore not merely an imposition of a different medium of communication; it was the imposition of a different epistemological framework, a different set of categories for organizing experience and understanding the world.

Mazhar's commitment to writing in Bengali is therefore not merely a preference for his mother tongue; it is a philosophical and political commitment to resisting the epistemological colonization that the privileging of European languages in intellectual discourse represents. This commitment is shared by many postcolonial intellectuals, but Mazhar takes it further than most. He does not merely write in Bengali; he insists on the specific resources of the Bangladeshi vernacular tradition, including the philosophical vocabulary of the Baul and Fakiri songs, the concepts that have been developed within that tradition to describe forms of experience and modes of being that have no equivalent in European philosophical languages.

The concept of *bhav* is the most important example of this commitment to the resources of the vernacular philosophical tradition. As noted in the previous chapter's discussion, *bhav* cannot be adequately translated into any European language without significant loss. The attempt to translate it as emotion, or feeling, or idea, or orientation, each of these captures one dimension of the concept but loses others. Mazhar insists on using the term in its Bengali form, and in building his philosophical argument around the Bangla term rather than its possible European equivalents, because he understands that the epistemological work the concept does is specific to the Bengali tradition and cannot be fully replicated in any other tradition.

This insistence on the untranslatability of certain key concepts from the vernacular philosophical tradition is itself a philosophical argument, an argument about the limits of universalization and about the conditions of genuine cross-cultural philosophical dialogue. The argument is not that cross-cultural dialogue is impossible or that the concepts of one tradition can never illuminate the experience of another. It is rather that genuine cross-cultural dialogue requires the willingness to encounter the other in their irreducible specificity, to allow the concepts of the other tradition to challenge and disturb one's own conceptual framework rather than simply assimilating them to categories one already possesses.

This is the kind of dialogue that Mazhar practices in his philosophical work, and it is what distinguishes his engagement with both the Western tradition and the Bengali tradition from the various forms of superficial cross-cultural comparison that are more common in academic discourse. He does not simply note the similarities between *bhav* and Heidegger's *Stimmung* and use this similarity to legitimate the Bengali concept by assimilating it to an already recognized Western category. He uses the encounter between the two concepts to generate new philosophical insight, to ask questions about the nature of human affective engagement with the world that neither concept, in isolation, would generate.

The politics of form in Mazhar's poetry is also connected to his theory of decolonization. The choice of specific poetic forms, the decision to work within the ghazal tradition, or the Baul song tradition, or the tradition of Islamic devotional poetry, rather than in the forms of European modernist verse that dominated the international literary scene in the twentieth century, is itself a political act: an assertion of the dignity and the philosophical richness of the vernacular tradition against the epistemological hierarchy that treats European literary forms as the universal standard and treats vernacular forms as local curiosities.

But this political act is not a simple rejection of European influence or a retreat into cultural nationalism. Mazhar is too sophisticated a thinker to imagine that the vernacular tradition can be simply recovered in its pure form, uncontaminated by the colonial encounter. The encounter with colonialism and with the epistemological assumptions of colonial modernity has transformed the vernacular tradition, has introduced new elements and new tensions, and has made it impossible to return to any pre-colonial form of the tradition. The task is not recovery but reinvention: the development, through a process of creative engagement with both the vernacular tradition and the resources of the colonizing culture, of new forms and new practices that are adequate to the actual conditions of postcolonial existence.

This is exactly what Mazhar's poetry does. It is not a simple reproduction of the Baul song form or the ghazal tradition; it is a transformation of those forms in the light of the conditions of postcolonial Bangladesh and in dialogue with the resources of international modernism and the theoretical traditions of the Western philosophical canon. The result is a body of poetic work that is genuinely hybrid in its form, that draws on multiple traditions and that belongs exclusively to none of them, and that is precisely for this reason adequate to the genuinely hybrid condition of postcolonial existence.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE CONTROVERSY OF ISLAMIC POETRY IN A SECULAR NATIONALIST CONTEXT

The reception of Mazhar's Islamic poetry, and particularly of *Ebadatnama*, in the context of Bangladeshi cultural and political life reveals the specific form that the tension between secular nationalism and Islamic cultural identity takes in Bangladesh and illuminates the specific position that Mazhar occupies in relation to that tension.

The secular nationalist tradition in Bangladesh, which emerged in its modern form from the Language Movement of 1952 and which achieved its greatest political expression in the Liberation War of 1971, has historically organized its cultural politics around a vision of Bengali identity that is defined primarily in linguistic and cultural terms, as Bengali rather than Muslim, and that treats religion as a private matter that should not intrude into the public sphere of politics and culture. This vision was articulated most powerfully in the four founding principles of the 1972 constitution, among which secularism was listed as one of the fundamental commitments of the new state, and it continues to define the self-understanding of the secular intelligentsia of Bangladesh.

Within this cultural framework, the use of Islamic language and imagery in serious literary and philosophical work is regarded with deep suspicion. It is seen as either a nostalgic longing for a pre-modern religious identity that has been superseded by the secular modernity of the national project, or as a covert attempt to introduce Islamist political ideology into the literary sphere, or as a form of pandering to the religious sensibilities of the rural majority that compromises the intellectual seriousness of the work. None of these interpretations is adequate to what Mazhar is actually doing in *Ebadatnama* and in his subsequent use of Islamic philosophical categories, but the inadequacy of these interpretations has not prevented them from shaping the reception of his work.

The reception of Mazhar's Islamic poetry among more orthodox religious readers has been equally problematic, though for different reasons. The tradition of Islamic devotional poetry in Bangladesh, which includes both the classical Sufi tradition and the more recent tradition of Islamic nationalist verse, has its own conventions and its own expectations, and Mazhar's poetry violates many of them. His irreverence toward God, his use of Islamic forms to make arguments that the orthodox would regard as deeply unorthodox, his insistence on the equal validity of the spiritual insights of the Baul and Fakiri traditions alongside the insights of Islam, all of these

features of his work are deeply offensive to readers who approach Islamic poetry with orthodox expectations.

The result is that Mazhar's Islamic poetry has found its home in a space that is defined primarily by its exclusion from both of the dominant cultural frameworks of Bangladeshi intellectual life. It belongs to neither the secular nationalist tradition nor the Islamic traditionalist tradition; it speaks to readers who are dissatisfied with both of these frameworks and who are looking for a form of cultural and political expression that takes seriously both the Islamic heritage of the Bengali people and the critique of political Islam, both the secular legacy of the Liberation War and the critique of secular nationalism's exclusion of the religious dimensions of Bengali cultural life.

The theoretical framework that makes it possible to articulate this in-between position is, as we have seen, the philosophy of *bhav* and the relational ontology that Mazhar derives from the Lalon tradition. The Lalon tradition itself occupied exactly this in-between position in the cultural landscape of Bengal: it was simultaneously part of the Islamic tradition, drawing on Sufi thought and using Islamic terminology, and deeply critical of the institutional religion of the mosque and the madrasa; simultaneously part of the Hindu Vaishnava tradition, drawing on the philosophy of *bhakti* and using the imagery of Krishna devotion, and deeply critical of the caste hierarchy and the Brahminical authority that the institutional religion of the temple represented. This double marginality, the refusal to be fully at home in either of the dominant religious traditions, was not a weakness of the Lalon tradition but its greatest philosophical strength: it gave the tradition the perspective from which the limitations of both traditions could be clearly seen.

Mazhar inherits and extends this double marginality. His in-between position in the cultural landscape of Bangladesh is not a sign of confusion or of political timidity. It is the position from which the most clear-eyed analysis of the limitations of all the available cultural and political frameworks becomes possible. And it is from this position that his most original intellectual contributions have emerged.

CHAPTER TWELVE: THE POEM AS POLITICAL INTERVENTION: SELECTED THEMATIC ANALYSES

Having examined the formal, philosophical, and political dimensions of Mazhar's poetic practice in general terms, this chapter undertakes a more focused analysis of specific thematic clusters in his poetry and of the way in which those themes connect his poetic work to his broader intellectual project.

The theme of land and ecology is one of the most pervasive in Mazhar's poetry, and it is one that connects his literary work most directly to his activism through UBINIG and the Nayakrishi Andolan. The Bengal delta, with its rivers, its seasonal flooding, its extraordinary agricultural fertility, and its intimate ecological relationships between human communities and their natural environment, is not merely the backdrop of Mazhar's poetry; it is one of its primary

philosophical objects. The poems that engage with this landscape are not nature poetry in the conventional sense, not poems that celebrate the beauty of the natural world from the aesthetic perspective of an observer who stands apart from it. They are poems that explore the relationship between human communities and their ecological conditions, poems that think about what it means to live in a landscape that is simultaneously the source of life and the site of political struggle.

The ecological dimension of Mazhar's poetry is connected to his analysis of the relationship between seed politics and sovereignty. The loss of the traditional seed varieties that have sustained Bengali agriculture for centuries, displaced by the commercial hybrid and genetically modified varieties promoted by the international agribusiness corporations, is not merely an agricultural event in Mazhar's analysis; it is a political and cultural catastrophe, the loss of a form of accumulated wisdom and a form of ecological relationship that cannot be replaced by any amount of technical innovation. The poems that address this theme are among the most politically charged in Mazhar's work, using the imagery of seed and soil to make arguments about political economy, about the rights of communities to control their own resources, and about the relationship between ecological knowledge and political sovereignty.

The theme of the body in Mazhar's poetry is equally significant and equally politically charged. Following the tradition of the Baul and Fakiri philosophy, which regards the body not as a prison for the soul or as a source of temptation to be mortified but as the primary site of spiritual and philosophical experience, Mazhar's poetry insists on the philosophical dignity of bodily experience, of sensuous engagement with the material world, of the knowledge that comes through the cultivation of the senses rather than through their suppression. This insistence on the philosophical dignity of the body is simultaneously a philosophical argument against the mind-body dualism of the Cartesian tradition, a spiritual argument against the asceticism that various forms of religious orthodoxy have associated with genuine spirituality, and a political argument against the tendency of both secular and religious political thought to abstract from the bodily conditions of human existence.

The body in Mazhar's poetry is not the body of biological science, the body as a mechanism operating according to physical laws. It is the lived body, the phenomenological body of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's analysis, the body as the primary mode of engagement with the world that underlies and makes possible all other forms of experience. But it is also the political body, the body that is marked by social position and by political history, the body that bears the traces of exploitation and of resistance. Mazhar's poems about the body are therefore simultaneously phenomenological explorations and political analyses, and the combination is one of the most distinctive and most powerful features of his poetic achievement.

The theme of time in Mazhar's poetry deserves special attention in the light of his philosophical engagement with Lalou's concept of *barzakh*. The poems that address the question of time in Mazhar's work are not meditations on mortality or on the passage of time in the conventional sense. They are philosophical arguments about the relationship between the present moment and the structures of political and historical time, about the tendency of political ideologies and historical narratives to subordinate the present to the past or to the future. The poem that insists on the fullness of the present moment, on the irreducible value of the actual lives of actual people

in the present, is simultaneously a philosophical statement about the nature of time and a political statement about the priority of the living over the dead and the yet-to-be-born.

The relationship between the present and the past is particularly important in the context of Bangladeshi political culture, where the past, and particularly the recent past of the Liberation War of 1971, is a constant reference point for political legitimation and delegitimation. The secular nationalist tradition has organized its politics largely around the legacy of 1971, claiming that its policies and its political positions are the authentic expression of the ideals for which the freedom fighters died. This appeal to the authority of the dead is, from Mazhar's perspective, a form of political manipulation that subordinates the needs and the agency of the living to a mythologized past that can be interpreted in whatever way serves the interests of the present political establishment.

Mazhar's poetic insistence on *bartoman*, on the fullness of the present moment, is therefore a challenge to this kind of political manipulation. It insists that the legitimacy of political programs must be evaluated in terms of their actual effects on the actual lives of people in the present, not in terms of their claimed fidelity to the ideals of a past that is always in danger of being idealized to the point of falsification.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: COMPARATIVE LITERARY AND PHILOSOPHICAL CONTEXTS

Mazhar's poetic achievement cannot be fully understood in isolation from the broader contexts of contemporary world literature and philosophy within which it is situated. This chapter examines his work in relation to several comparative frameworks that illuminate its significance and its originality.

The comparison with the tradition of poetry and philosophy in Latin America is particularly illuminating. Latin America has produced, in the twentieth century, a number of major poet-philosophers whose work combines lyrical intensity, philosophical depth, and political commitment in ways that are broadly analogous to Mazhar's combination. Figures like Pablo Neruda, Octavio Paz, Cesar Vallejo, and more recently Derek Walcott and Wilson Harris from the Caribbean, have all engaged with the challenge of developing a literary voice adequate to the specific conditions of postcolonial existence: a voice that is rooted in the particular cultural and historical experience of its place of origin while also engaging with the universal questions of human existence and political justice.

The comparison with Paz is particularly illuminating. Paz, the Mexican poet and essayist who won the Nobel Prize in 1990, was engaged throughout his intellectual career with questions that are closely analogous to those that animate Mazhar's work: the question of how to understand Mexican cultural identity in the light of its complex inheritance of pre-Columbian, colonial Spanish, and modern European and American influences; the question of the relationship between the individual and the community, between the spiritual and the political; the question of what kind of art and what kind of politics are adequate to the conditions of postcolonial

modernity. Paz's major prose work, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, which analyzes the specific character of Mexican cultural identity and its relationship to the colonial and pre-colonial past, is a work that engages with concerns very similar to those that animate Mazhar's engagement with Bengali cultural identity.

The comparison with the tradition of African oral literature and its relationship to written poetry is also illuminating. The tradition of the West African griot, the professional poet-historian-philosopher whose oral performances serve simultaneously as entertainment, as political commentary, as historical record, and as philosophical reflection, has parallels to the tradition of the Baul and Fakiri performers that Mazhar draws on and that has shaped his own poetic practice. The African literary scholars Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe, who have engaged most seriously with the relationship between oral tradition and written literature in the African context, have developed arguments about the politics of form and the epistemology of vernacular knowledge that are closely analogous to the arguments that Mazhar makes in the Bengali context.

The connection with the tradition of Urdu poetry is also important and often overlooked. Urdu poetry, which has its own rich tradition of philosophical-devotional verse, including the ghazal tradition and the tradition of the marsiya, the elegiac poem, was one of the dominant literary traditions of the Indian subcontinent before partition and continues to be a major literary tradition. The connection between the Urdu and the Bengali devotional traditions, running through the shared heritage of Sufism, creates a literary-philosophical kinship between Mazhar's work and the traditions of Urdu poetry that transcends the political and religious divisions of partition.

The comparison with the tradition of Jewish philosophical poetry, and particularly with the work of Paul Celan, the Romanian-born German-language poet who survived the Holocaust and who developed one of the most philosophically dense and politically charged poetic voices of the twentieth century, is also illuminating. Celan's poetry, which uses the German language as a philosophical instrument for thinking about the most extreme forms of historical violence and about the conditions of survival and witness after catastrophe, shares with Mazhar's work a commitment to using poetry as a mode of philosophical thinking rather than merely as a mode of aesthetic expression. Both poets are engaged with questions about the relationship between language and silence, between speech and the unspeakable, between the poem's capacity to bear witness to historical violence and its inevitable inadequacy to that task.

The contemporary global context of poetry and philosophy in the twenty-first century provides additional comparative frameworks for understanding Mazhar's significance. The growing international recognition of the philosophical significance of non-Western poetic traditions, driven in part by the postcolonial turn in literary studies and in part by the increasing diversity of the international literary field, has created conditions in which Mazhar's work can be read and appreciated by a wider audience than was available to him in the earlier decades of his career. The translation of Bengali poetry into English and other European languages, still inadequate compared to the richness of the tradition being translated, has given some access to his work to readers who cannot engage with it in its original language.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE QUESTION OF LITERARY LEGACY AND THE NEW SCHOOL OF POETRY

The claim that Mazhar has initiated almost a new school of poetry in Bangladesh is one that deserves careful analysis, both because it reflects the genuine significance of his poetic achievement and because the concept of a school of poetry raises complex questions about literary influence, about the relationship between individual creativity and collective tradition, and about the criteria by which we identify genuinely new directions in literary history.

A school of poetry, in the literary-historical sense, is not merely a group of poets who share a set of stylistic preferences or formal techniques. It is a group of poets who share a set of philosophical and aesthetic commitments that generate a characteristic approach to what poetry is for, what it can do, and how it does it. The Romantic school, the Symbolist school, the Imagist school, the Beat school: each of these represents not merely a style but a philosophy of poetry, an understanding of the relationship between the poem, the poet, the reader, and the world.

Mazhar's contribution to a new school of Bengali poetry is, in this sense, primarily a philosophical contribution. He has demonstrated, through his practice over more than four decades, that it is possible to write Bengali poetry that is simultaneously committed to the Bengali cultural and philosophical tradition, to the tradition of Lalon and the Bauls and the Sufi poets, and to the most rigorous theoretical and political engagement with the conditions of postcolonial modernity. He has shown that the philosophical vocabulary of the vernacular tradition is not a museum piece but a living resource for contemporary thinking. And he has demonstrated that the poem can bear the weight of philosophical argument without losing its character as a poem, without sacrificing the qualities of sensuous immediacy and emotional engagement that distinguish poetry from other forms of discourse.

The poets who have been influenced by Mazhar's work, who form the loosely connected group that might be called his school, are not defined by stylistic similarity to him. They are defined by a shared commitment to using the resources of the Bengali vernacular tradition, and particularly the tradition of philosophical-devotional poetry, as a starting point for thinking about the political and cultural conditions of contemporary Bangladesh. They are poets who take seriously both the philosophical depth of the tradition they have inherited and the urgency of the political situation in which they find themselves, and who refuse the separation of the aesthetic from the political, the spiritual from the material, that the dominant cultural frameworks of Bangladesh tend to enforce.

The influence of Mazhar's work on the student movement of 2024 is the most dramatic recent evidence of this influence. When the theoretical framework of his 2023 book on mass uprising and constitution became part of the intellectual equipment of the students who were risking their lives in the streets of Dhaka, it demonstrated that the philosophical and political work that Mazhar has been doing for decades had produced not merely an intellectual legacy but a political capacity: the capacity to think clearly and radically about the conditions of political transformation in Bangladesh.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: CONTEMPORARY THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND MAZHAR'S RELEVANCE

The final chapter of Part Two examines the relationship between Mazhar's intellectual project and the most significant developments in contemporary philosophy, political theory, and literary criticism, assessing his relevance to the theoretical debates of the 2020s and beyond.

In contemporary political philosophy, the most significant development relevant to Mazhar's constitutional theory is the revival and elaboration of the concept of popular sovereignty and constituent power in the context of the global democratic crisis. The political scientist Ivan Krastev and the political theorist Jan-Werner Mueller have both analyzed the ways in which the institutions of liberal democracy have become increasingly disconnected from the genuine will of the people, how the formal procedures of democratic governance are being used to legitimate political outcomes that a genuine expression of popular sovereignty would reject. This analysis converges with Mazhar's long-standing argument that formal democratic procedures are insufficient guarantees of genuine popular sovereignty and that a more substantive form of constituent power is necessary for genuinely democratic governance.

The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben's analysis of the state of exception and its relationship to the normal constitutional order is also directly relevant to Mazhar's constitutional thought. Agamben, developing Carl Schmitt's analysis of the exception through the lens of Foucault's biopolitics, argues that the modern state's capacity to suspend the normal constitutional order through the declaration of a state of exception is not an aberration but a structural feature of the constitutional state itself. This analysis is directly relevant to the situation of Bangladesh in 2024, when the fall of the Hasina government created precisely the kind of constitutional vacuum that Agamben's framework would predict: a situation in which the normal constitutional order had been suspended and in which the question of the grounds of legitimate political authority was posed in its most acute form.

Mazhar's response to the Bangladeshi constitutional crisis of 2024 is not, however, the response that Agamben's framework would suggest. Where Agamben tends toward a kind of political pessimism, seeing in the state of exception not a crisis to be resolved but a permanent condition to be lived with, Mazhar's response is constructive and politically engaged: a specific proposal for how the constituent power of the people can be exercised through a genuine constituent assembly to produce a new constitutional order that is genuinely legitimate. This constructive response is grounded in the philosophical tradition of the Bengal delta and in the concept of *bhav*, which provides a positive vision of what genuine political community looks like, rather than merely a critique of existing forms of political domination.

In contemporary literary theory, the most significant development relevant to Mazhar's poetic philosophy is the growing recognition of the philosophical significance of non-Western poetic traditions and of the need to develop genuinely comparative frameworks for literary analysis that do not simply assimilate non-Western traditions to the categories of the Western literary canon. The work of scholars like Sheldon Pollock on the Sanskrit cosmopolis, David Damrosch on

world literature, and more recently the growing literature on decolonizing literary studies, has begun to create the intellectual conditions for a more genuine engagement with the philosophical richness of traditions like the Bengali devotional poetry tradition that Mazhar draws on and elaborates.

Mazhar's own theoretical contributions to this project, particularly his philosophical engagement with the concepts of *bhav* and *bartoman* and his demonstration that these concepts can be placed in genuine dialogue with the theoretical resources of the Western philosophical tradition, represent a significant contribution to the project of decolonizing literary theory. His work demonstrates that the decolonization of literary theory requires not merely the inclusion of more texts from non-Western traditions in the curriculum but a genuine transformation of the theoretical frameworks through which literary phenomena are analyzed and evaluated.

The growing literature on the philosophy of emotion and affect in contemporary philosophy, associated with thinkers like Brian Massumi, Teresa Brennan, and Sara Ahmed, is also relevant to Mazhar's philosophical project. These thinkers have argued, against the dominant cognitive tradition in philosophy of mind and epistemology, that affect and emotion are not merely secondary accompaniments to rational cognition but fundamental dimensions of human engagement with the world that shape perception, judgment, and action in ways that the purely cognitive model cannot account for. This argument converges with Mazhar's understanding of *bhav* as a mode of affective-cognitive engagement that is primary rather than secondary, that underlies and shapes all other forms of experience rather than being merely a reaction to them.

The ecological turn in contemporary philosophy, associated with thinkers like Timothy Morton, whose concept of dark ecology challenges the conventional boundaries between the human and the non-human, and Jane Bennett, whose concept of vibrant matter argues for the philosophical recognition of the agency of non-human entities, is also relevant to Mazhar's ecological philosophy. These thinkers are, from within the Western philosophical tradition, arriving at positions that have affinities with the ecological philosophy that Mazhar has been developing from within the Bengali tradition for decades. The convergence is not coincidental: both traditions are responding to the ecological crisis of capitalist modernity by developing philosophical frameworks that challenge the human-nature dualism that has been fundamental to Western modernity and that has been one of the ideological foundations of the exploitative relationship to the natural world that has produced the current ecological crisis.

The question of what Mazhar's intellectual project can contribute to these contemporary theoretical debates is one that cannot be answered in the abstract; it requires the kind of genuine intellectual encounter, the kind of two-way dialogue between traditions, that Mazhar himself practices. What is clear, from the analysis undertaken in this and the preceding chapter, is that his work contains resources that are genuinely relevant to the most important theoretical debates of the present moment, and that the engagement with his work by the international scholarly community is a project that would enrich those debates significantly.

CONCLUDING NOTE TO PART TWO: THE WORD AS A FORM OF LIFE

Part Two of this textbook has examined Farhad Mazhar's poetic work in its formal, philosophical, political, and comparative dimensions. It has argued that his poetry is not merely an aesthetic achievement, though it is that, but a philosophical and political achievement of the first order: a demonstration that the poem can serve as a primary mode of philosophical thinking, a vehicle for forms of knowledge that discursive prose cannot reach, and a site of political intervention that operates through the transformation of the reader's mode of being rather than merely through the transmission of political information or the articulation of political positions.

The analysis has shown that Mazhar's poetic philosophy is grounded in a coherent and sophisticated understanding of the relationship between form and content, between the vernacular tradition and the theoretical resources of international philosophy, and between the aesthetic and the political dimensions of literary production. It has shown that his engagement with the Islamic devotional tradition, with the Baul and Fakiri tradition of Lalon Shah Fakir, and with the tradition of the Nadia school represents a genuinely original contribution to the philosophical analysis of these traditions, not merely their literary exploitation.

It has also shown that the controversies generated by his work, the label of Communist Mullah, the accusations of blasphemy from the religious right and of Islamism from the secular left, the 1995 arrest, and the ongoing suspicion with which established institutions regard his work, are not signs of his marginality but of his significance. A thinker who is equally uncomfortable for the religious establishment and the secular establishment, who is accused of crypto-Islamism by secularists and of crypto-Marxism by Islamists, has achieved something rare: a position of genuine critical independence from all the dominant frameworks of their intellectual culture.

The word, in Mazhar's poetic philosophy, is not merely an instrument for the expression of meanings that exist independently of it. It is a form of life, a mode of engagement with the world that creates possibilities of experience, understanding, and solidarity that would not exist without it. The poem is not a luxury or an ornament. It is, in the conditions of postcolonial Bangladesh, one of the primary means by which human beings can constitute themselves as free and thinking agents rather than as the objects of political manipulation and ideological mystification.

This understanding of the word as a form of life connects Mazhar's poetic philosophy to the deepest traditions of Bengali philosophical poetry, from the Charyapada through the Bauls to Tagore, and it connects it also to the most important contemporary discussions in philosophy, literary theory, and political thought. It is an understanding that is both deeply rooted in a specific cultural tradition and genuinely universal in its implications, and it is this combination that makes Mazhar's poetic achievement one of the significant literary-philosophical achievements of the postcolonial world in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Part Three of this textbook will examine Mazhar's agricultural activism and his theory of food sovereignty, analyzing the philosophical framework that underlies the Nayakrishi Andolan and its significance for contemporary debates about ecological justice, agricultural policy, and the rights of farming communities in an era of global capitalist agriculture.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC AND THEORETICAL NOTES FOR PART TWO

The theoretical frameworks engaged in Part Two draw on a range of traditions in literary theory, philosophy of language, aesthetics, and the history of philosophy. The following notes identify key theoretical reference points and directions for further reading.

On the history of Bengali philosophical poetry and the Baul and Fakiri traditions, essential resources include Jeanne Openshaw's *Seeking Bauls of Bengal* (2002), Carol Salomon's work on Baul songs, Shashibhusan Dasgupta's *Obscure Religious Cults* (1946), and the more recent collection edited by Mimlu Sen, *Baulsphere* (2009). For Lalon Shah Fakir specifically, the scholarly literature includes Wakil Ahmed's biography and the philosophical analysis in a recent 2024 paper in the journal *South Asian Review* on the concept of Moner Manush by Sufia Uddin, published in conjunction with a Tandf journal, which provides useful context for understanding Mazhar's engagement.

On Heidegger's concept of Being and its relationship to non-Western philosophical traditions, Graham Priest and Jay Garfield's work on the philosophy of emptiness in Buddhist thought and its relationship to Heidegger provides useful comparative context. The emerging literature on Heidegger and postcolonial philosophy, associated with scholars like Robert Bernasconi and Lewis Gordon, is also relevant.

On Foucault and political spirituality, the essential texts are Foucault's essays on Iran collected in Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson's *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* (2005), which includes both the original essays and critical responses. Talal Asad's *Formations of the Secular* (2003) provides important context for understanding the broader debate about secularism, religion, and political modernity that Mazhar's work engages with.

On the philosophy of language and the politics of vernacular knowledge, Walter D. Mignolo's *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2000) and his subsequent work on the colonial matrix of power and on decoloniality provide important theoretical context. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) and his more recent *Something Torn and New* (2009) provide the African literary perspective on the politics of language choice that illuminates Mazhar's Bengali-language commitment.

On contemporary philosophy of affect and its relationship to Mazhar's concept of *bhav*, Brian Massumi's *Parables for the Virtual* (2002) and Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) provide the most relevant frameworks. The connection between affect theory and political philosophy is developed in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Multitude* (2004) and *Commonwealth* (2009).

On decolonizing literary theory and world literature, David Damrosch's *What is World Literature?* (2003), Emily Apter's *The Translation Zone* (2006), and the more recent collection edited by Bhavya Tiwari and Rainer Emig on *Non-Anglophone Modernisms* provide relevant theoretical context. The specific question of South Asian vernacular modernisms is addressed in Rosemary George's edited collection *Burning Down the House* (1998) and in more recent work by scholars like Sukanta Chaudhuri on the literary culture of Bengal.

End of Part Two. Part Three will examine Farhad Mazhar's agricultural activism, the founding and development of the Nayakrishi Andolan, his theory of food sovereignty, and the philosophical and political implications of his ecological philosophy for contemporary debates about justice, rights, and the relationship between human communities and their natural environment.

PART THREE: SEED, SOIL, AND SOVEREIGNTY

Farhad Mazhar's Ecological Philosophy, the Nayakrishi Andolan, Food Sovereignty Theory, and the Politics of Agricultural Transformation

PROLOGUE TO PART THREE: WHEN THE FIELD BECOMES THE SEMINAR ROOM

There is a moment in the intellectual biography of every genuinely original thinker when theory and practice discover their mutual indispensability, when the abstract question that has been circling in the mind for years suddenly appears, in all its concrete urgency, in the face of another human being, in the texture of a piece of soil, in the weight of a seed resting in an open palm. For Farhad Mazhar, this moment did not arrive as a single epiphany but as a sustained encounter, stretched over decades of work with the farming communities of the Bangladesh delta, an encounter that transformed not only his understanding of agriculture and ecology but his understanding of philosophy, of politics, of sovereignty, and of what it means to think honestly about the conditions of human existence.

The Nayakrishi Andolan, the New Agriculture Movement that Mazhar helped to found and that now involves over three hundred thousand farming families across nineteen districts of Bangladesh, is not, in Mazhar's own understanding or in the understanding of those who have studied it most carefully, primarily an agricultural movement. It is a philosophical movement, a movement grounded in a specific and carefully worked-out understanding of the relationship between human beings and their natural environment, between knowledge and practice, between political sovereignty and the capacity to feed oneself and one's community. Agriculture, in this understanding, is not a technical activity to be optimized through the application of scientific knowledge developed in laboratory conditions and delivered to farmers through extension services. It is a form of life, a total engagement of human faculties, emotional and sensuous and intellectual and spiritual, with the living world from which all human existence ultimately derives.

This understanding of agriculture as a form of life connects Mazhar's ecological philosophy directly to the other dimensions of his intellectual project that we have examined in Parts One and Two: to his relational ontology, to his philosophy of bhav, to his critique of the

epistemological assumptions of colonial modernity, and to his constitutional theory of popular sovereignty. The seed is not merely a biological entity or an economic commodity; it is, in Mazhar's analysis, the site at which all of these dimensions of human existence converge, the point where ecology and economy, culture and politics, knowledge and practice, sovereignty and survival are all simultaneously at stake.

Part Three of this textbook examines this ecological philosophy in its full depth and complexity. It traces the historical development of the Nayakrishi Andolan from its origins in the intellectual and practical challenges of the late 1980s and early 1990s to its current form as one of the most significant farmer-led ecological movements in South Asia. It examines the theoretical framework of food sovereignty that Mazhar has helped to develop and that has become one of the central concepts in global debates about agricultural policy, trade, and the rights of farming communities. It places this theoretical framework in dialogue with the broader traditions of ecological philosophy, political economy, and jurisprudence with which it is in conversation. And it assesses the significance of Mazhar's ecological philosophy for the most pressing contemporary debates about climate change, biodiversity loss, food justice, and the future of agriculture in an era of ecological crisis.

CHAPTER ONE: THE CRISIS OF BANGLADESHI AGRICULTURE AND THE NECESSITY OF AN ALTERNATIVE

To understand the intellectual and political significance of the Nayakrishi Andolan, one must first understand the specific agricultural crisis that it was developed to address. Bangladesh in the late 1980s was a country in which the promises of the Green Revolution, the program of agricultural modernization centered on high-yielding variety seeds, chemical fertilizers, synthetic pesticides, and intensive irrigation, were showing their fundamental limitations with increasing clarity. The story of the Green Revolution in Bangladesh is in many respects a paradigmatic case study in the contradictions of development ideology, and it is essential background for understanding both the specific problem that the Nayakrishi Andolan was designed to address and the broader theoretical framework within which Mazhar situates his ecological philosophy.

The Green Revolution itself, the international program of agricultural modernization that transformed rice and wheat agriculture across Asia and Latin America from the 1960s onward, was developed in response to a genuine crisis: the specter of mass famine in the rapidly growing populations of the newly independent nations of the Global South. The development of high-yielding variety seeds of rice and wheat by plant breeders working at international research centers, including the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines and the Centro Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maiz y Trigo in Mexico, produced varieties that, under optimal conditions and with the application of chemical fertilizers and controlled irrigation, could produce yields several times higher than the traditional varieties they were designed to replace.

The achievements of the Green Revolution in averting the famines that had seemed imminent in the 1960s were real and significant. Norman Borlaug, the American plant breeder who was one

of the key architects of the Green Revolution, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for his work on wheat varieties, and the award reflected a genuine acknowledgment that the Green Revolution had contributed to preventing widespread starvation. But the longer-term consequences of the Green Revolution were deeply contradictory, and it is these longer-term consequences that form the critical context for Mazhar's agricultural philosophy.

The adoption of high-yielding variety seeds required the simultaneous adoption of chemical fertilizers, synthetic pesticides, and, in most cases, intensive irrigation, because the new varieties had been developed for optimal performance under these conditions and were in many respects incapable of performing well without them. This dependency on external inputs transformed the economic logic of farming in fundamental ways. Farmers who adopted Green Revolution technology became dependent on the market for their seeds, their fertilizers, and their pesticides in a way that farmers who had saved and exchanged their own seeds and who had managed their soils through organic methods had never been. The cost of these inputs consumed an increasing proportion of the value of the harvest, eroding the economic margin available to farming families and increasing their indebtedness.

The ecological consequences were equally serious. The new high-yielding varieties were designed for specific, standardized growing conditions, which meant that the adoption of these varieties involved a massive reduction in agricultural biodiversity: the replacement of the thousands of locally adapted rice varieties that Bengali farmers had developed and maintained over centuries with a small number of scientifically designed varieties optimized for specific productivity metrics. This loss of biodiversity had immediate practical consequences, including increased vulnerability to pests and diseases, loss of the diversity of nutritional profiles that the traditional varieties had provided, and loss of the cultural and spiritual significance of the specific varieties associated with particular festivals, food traditions, and social occasions.

The ecological consequences extended beyond the loss of crop diversity. The intensive use of chemical fertilizers and synthetic pesticides degraded soil ecology, killing the complex communities of microorganisms, insects, and other organisms that maintain soil fertility and that had made the Bengal delta one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world without the application of any external inputs for thousands of years. The intensive extraction of groundwater for irrigation in the dry season depleted aquifers that had provided water not only for agriculture but for human consumption, creating water security problems in regions that had previously been abundantly supplied with fresh water.

The social consequences of the Green Revolution were as significant as the ecological ones. The technology of the Green Revolution was not neutral in its social effects; it tended systematically to favor larger farmers with the capital to invest in the required inputs and with access to the credit and the extension services that the technology demanded. Smaller farmers, and particularly the landless poor and women farmers, who had traditionally played a central role in the management of agricultural biodiversity and the maintenance of seed knowledge, were marginalized by a model of agriculture that required capital-intensive inputs and that concentrated decision-making power in the hands of male heads of household with access to markets and credit.

It was in this context of deepening ecological and social crisis that Mazhar and his colleagues at UBINIG began to develop the conceptual and practical foundations of the Nayakrishi Andolan. The movement did not begin with a blueprint; it began with a question. Farmers in the areas where UBINIG was working were coming to the UBINIG researchers not with a desire to learn more about the Green Revolution technology they had been encouraged to adopt but with a desire to find an alternative to it. They were fed up with the increasing cost of inputs, the decreasing returns on their investments, the degradation of their soils, and the loss of the diversity that had made their agricultural systems resilient and nutritionally rich. They were asking, in effect, whether it was possible to practice agriculture differently, to produce food for their families and their communities without the chemical inputs and the purchased seeds that the development establishment had told them were indispensable.

The intellectual challenge that this question posed was enormous, and Mazhar's response to it was characteristic: he took the question seriously as a philosophical question, not merely as a technical agricultural question. The farmers' desire to practice agriculture differently was, in his analysis, not merely a desire for a different technical system; it was a desire for a different kind of relationship with the natural world, a different kind of knowledge, a different kind of community, and a different kind of sovereignty over their own lives and livelihoods. The question was not merely: which agricultural technique produces more food with fewer chemical inputs? It was: what kind of human relationship with the natural world is both ecologically sustainable and genuinely fulfilling, and what kind of social and political arrangements are necessary to support that relationship?

CHAPTER TWO: THE TEN PRINCIPLES OF NAYAKRISHI: A PHILOSOPHICAL READING

The ten principles that define the practice of the Nayakrishi Andolan are often presented, in the movement's own literature and in the scholarly literature about it, primarily as agricultural rules: practical guidelines for farming without chemical inputs and with a commitment to biodiversity conservation. They are certainly that. But they are also much more than that, and a careful philosophical reading of the ten principles reveals that they embody a comprehensive philosophical position about the relationship between human beings and their natural environment, between knowledge and practice, between individual action and community solidarity, and between the present and the future.

The first and most fundamental principle is the absolute prohibition on the use of pesticides or any chemicals in farming. This principle is presented by the movement as a non-negotiable commitment, a condition of participation in the Nayakrishi community rather than merely a recommendation or an aspiration. To understand why this prohibition has this status, rather than being treated as a pragmatic guideline to be applied with flexibility as circumstances require, one must engage with the philosophical understanding of chemical use in agriculture that underlies it.

Mazhar's philosophical analysis of chemical pesticides and fertilizers is not primarily an analysis of their direct ecological effects, though he is fully aware of those effects and incorporates them

into his critique. It is an analysis of the kind of relationship with the natural world that the use of chemicals embodies and reproduces. Chemical agriculture is grounded in a conception of the natural world as a resource to be exploited through technical domination, a conception that treats the soil not as a living community of organisms but as a substrate to be manipulated through the application of synthetic nutrients, that treats pests not as part of the ecological community in which agriculture is embedded but as enemies to be destroyed through chemical warfare. This conception of the relationship between human agriculture and the natural world is, in Mazhar's analysis, both ecologically destructive and philosophically false.

The philosophical falseness of this conception lies in its reduction of the complex, dynamic, self-organizing ecological communities of the natural world to a set of factors to be manipulated in the service of a predetermined productive outcome. This reduction is an instance of the broader epistemological error that Mazhar identifies as characteristic of modern technocratic thought: the error of treating complex relational systems as if they were simple mechanisms, of applying the logic of engineering to phenomena that are inherently organic and ecological rather than mechanical. The soil is not a substrate; it is a community of thousands of species of microorganisms, fungi, insects, and other organisms, all engaged in intricate relationships of mutual dependence and cooperation that constitute the fertility of the soil. To treat this community as a substrate is not merely a factual error; it is an ontological error, a failure to understand what kind of entity one is dealing with.

The prohibition on chemicals is therefore not merely a practical rule about farming technique; it is a statement about what kind of relationship with the natural world is possible and desirable, a statement that farming must be conducted in a mode of engagement with rather than domination of the living communities of the soil and the landscape. This philosophical understanding of the farmer's relationship with the natural world is expressed in the Nayakrishi principle of *shahaj*, which translates roughly as the natural or easy way, but which carries a much deeper philosophical charge than any of these translations capture. *Shahaj*, in the Baul and Fakiri tradition from which Mazhar derives the concept, refers to the mode of being in the world that arises from the dissolution of the ego's grasping and controlling tendencies, the mode of being that is characterized by openness, receptivity, and joyful participation in the life of the world rather than by the anxious effort to master and control it.

The application of the concept of *shahaj* to agricultural practice is one of Mazhar's most original contributions to both ecological philosophy and to the interpretation of the Bengali philosophical tradition. He is arguing that the Baul and Fakiri understanding of the right relationship between the human being and the world applies not only in the domain of spiritual practice and interpersonal relationship but in the domain of agriculture and the practical engagement with the natural world. The farmer who practices Nayakrishi, who tends her soil and her seeds with the attentive care and the receptive openness that *shahaj* demands, is not merely practicing a different agricultural technique; she is practicing a different mode of being in the world, a mode that has implications for every dimension of her life and for the kind of community in which she participates.

The second cluster of Nayakrishi principles, those concerned with the maintenance of a farmer seed system and the conservation of seed biodiversity, are equally rich in philosophical

significance. The principle that seeds must remain in the hands of farmers, that farmer households must be transformed into dynamic sites of in situ and ex situ conservation of seed and genetic resources, is not merely a practical agricultural guideline; it is a statement about sovereignty. The farmer who controls her own seeds controls the fundamental means of agricultural production, and the farmer who depends on purchased seeds from a commercial seed company has surrendered a crucial dimension of her economic and political sovereignty to the market and to the corporations that control it.

This analysis of seed sovereignty as a dimension of political sovereignty is one of Mazhar's most important theoretical contributions, and it connects his ecological philosophy directly to his constitutional theory. The argument runs as follows: genuine popular sovereignty, the genuine capacity of a community to be the author of its own collective life, requires control not only over the formal political institutions of the state but over the material conditions of life, including the agricultural conditions on which all human existence ultimately depends. A community that has been deprived of control over its seeds, and therefore of control over the means by which it feeds itself, is not a sovereign community in any meaningful sense, regardless of what formal constitutional provisions may say about its political rights. The restoration of seed sovereignty to farming communities is therefore not merely an agricultural project; it is a constitutional project, a project of restoring to communities the material foundations of genuine political sovereignty.

The third cluster of Nayakrishi principles, those concerned with the cultivation of uncultivated biodiversity and the management of multiple agricultural spaces, represents perhaps the most theoretically innovative dimension of the movement's philosophy. The conventional understanding of agriculture, both in the dominant development model and in most academic treatments of agricultural economics, treats cultivation as the only legitimate form of food production, as the activity that defines agriculture and distinguishes it from other forms of engagement with the natural world. Everything that happens in the agricultural landscape outside the specifically cultivated spaces, the forests, the water bodies, the field margins, the uncultivated grasslands, is treated as marginal to the agricultural system, as background or habitat for the cultivation that is the real business of farming.

Nayakrishi rejects this conventional understanding fundamentally and develops in its place a conception of agriculture as the management of multiple spaces, both cultivated and uncultivated, in a way that maximizes the contribution of all of these spaces to the food security, nutritional health, and livelihood of farming families and communities. The uncultivated foods, the leafy greens, tubers, small fish, and small animals that are collected from the margins of agricultural fields, from water bodies, and from forests, are not supplementary to the agricultural system; they are, in many cases, the most nutritious and the most culturally significant elements of the food system, the foods that provide the micronutrients and the dietary diversity that the staple crops alone cannot supply.

This understanding of uncultivated biodiversity as an integral component of the agricultural system has profound implications for the way in which food security and food sovereignty are understood and measured. The conventional metrics of food security, focused almost exclusively on the production of staple crops and their caloric contribution to the diet, miss the nutritional contribution of uncultivated foods entirely, and therefore systematically underestimate the actual

food security of communities that maintain access to diverse uncultivated food sources. More seriously, development interventions that aim to increase the production of staple crops through the intensification of cultivation often destroy the ecological conditions that make uncultivated food sources available, replacing nutritional diversity with caloric abundance and calling this process development.

Mazhar's analysis of the politics of this miscounting is sharp and politically significant. The failure of the development establishment to recognize the nutritional and livelihood value of uncultivated biodiversity is not, in his analysis, a neutral scientific error. It is an ideologically motivated blindness, a tendency to recognize and value only those forms of agricultural production that can be commodified, measured, and incorporated into the formal economy, while ignoring or actively devaluing forms of production that take place outside the market and that are therefore invisible to the economic metrics that the development establishment uses to assess progress and poverty.

The connection between this analysis and the feminist critique of the invisibility of women's unpaid care work in conventional economic accounting is explicit and important. The uncultivated foods that are collected, prepared, and served primarily by women are invisible to the formal economy for the same reason that women's care work is invisible: because neither is mediated by market transactions and therefore neither appears in the GDP statistics and other economic metrics that shape development policy. Mazhar's analysis of uncultivated biodiversity is therefore simultaneously an ecological analysis, an economic analysis, and a feminist analysis, and it contributes to the developing literature on feminist political ecology that has been one of the most productive areas of development studies and environmental humanities in the past two decades.

CHAPTER THREE: THE SHAHAJ WAY TO ANANDA: PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF NAYAKRISHI FARMING

The guiding philosophical principle of the Nayakrishi movement, expressed in the phrase the shahaj way to ananda, the natural way to joy, deserves extended analysis because it encapsulates in concentrated form the entire philosophical vision that underlies the movement and connects its practical agricultural work to the broader philosophical project of Farhad Mazhar's intellectual career.

The concept of shahaj, as noted above, derives from the Bengali philosophical tradition associated with the Baul and Fakiri movements. In its original context, shahaj refers to the mode of spiritual practice that is characterized by simplicity, naturalness, and the absence of artificial effort or ego-driven striving. The shahaj practitioner is not one who achieves spiritual insight through rigorous ascetic discipline or intense intellectual effort but one who has learned to be fully present to the natural movement of life, to let the truth reveal itself through attentive receptivity rather than pursuing it through aggressive analytical activity. This is not passivity; it is a highly cultivated form of active attention, a state of what the Zen tradition would call

effortless effort, in which the practitioner is fully engaged with the process of life without the ego's usual agenda of control and manipulation.

The application of this concept to agricultural practice produces a specific understanding of what good farming looks like. The shahaj farmer does not approach the agricultural landscape as a problem to be solved through the application of technical expertise. She approaches it as a partner in a collaborative process of life production, a process in which her contribution is not the imposition of a predetermined technical solution but the cultivation of an attentive relationship with the living community of the soil, the plants, the insects, the birds, and the other organisms that constitute the agricultural ecosystem. Her agricultural knowledge is not the abstract, universalizing knowledge of agricultural science; it is the contextual, relational, and experientially grounded knowledge of someone who has spent years in attentive engagement with a specific place and its specific ecological conditions.

This concept of contextual, relational, and experientially grounded knowledge is connected to what has been called, in the philosophy of science and in the literature on traditional ecological knowledge, indigenous knowledge or local knowledge, though Mazhar tends to avoid these terms because of their tendency to imply a static, pre-modern quality that does not do justice to the dynamic and innovative character of the knowledge traditions he is describing. The agricultural knowledge maintained by the Nayakrishi farming communities is not merely the preservation of ancient techniques; it is a living tradition of knowledge production that is constantly developing in response to changing ecological and social conditions, that incorporates new information and new techniques when these are compatible with its underlying principles, and that generates genuine innovations in farming practice through the systematic application of farmers' attentive observation of their ecological conditions.

The concept of ananda, which is the goal of the shahaj way, is equally philosophically rich. Ananda, in the Sanskrit and Bengali philosophical traditions, is not merely pleasure or happiness in the ordinary psychological sense. It is a quality of being, a state of fundamental joy that arises from the right relationship between the human being and the ground of existence. In the Vedantic tradition, ananda is one of the three fundamental qualities of Brahman, the universal ground of being, along with sat, being or existence, and chit, consciousness or awareness. The formula sat-chit-ananda, being-consciousness-bliss, expresses the understanding that the ground of existence is not merely a neutral substrate but is characterized by a quality of joyful aliveness that is available to human beings when they relate to it in the right way.

Mazhar's use of the concept of ananda in the context of farming practice is not a simple secularization of this metaphysical concept; it is a philosophical argument about the relationship between the way of life and the quality of experience available within that way of life. The farmer who practices agriculture in the shahaj way, who engages with the living community of the agricultural landscape with attentive care and receptive openness rather than with technical control and chemical domination, does not merely produce food more sustainably or more ecologically responsibly. She also experiences a different quality of engagement with her work and with the world, a quality of engagement that is not available within the industrial agricultural model. This is not a romantic fantasy about the simple happiness of peasant life; it is a philosophical claim about the relationship between modes of practice and modes of experience, a

claim that the practices of ecological, relational farming cultivate forms of attention and forms of connection that generate genuine joy, while the practices of industrial farming, with their emphasis on technical control and economic optimization, systematically preclude such joy.

The philosophical connection between this analysis and the concept of alienation in Marx's early writings is direct and important. Marx's concept of alienated labor describes precisely the condition of the worker whose labor is not an expression of their creative powers and their engagement with the world but is a mere means of survival, a commodity they sell in the labor market in exchange for the wages that enable them to purchase the commodities their survival requires. In the alienated condition, the worker cannot experience genuine joy in their labor because the labor is not genuinely their own; it belongs to the capitalist who has purchased their labor power, and it produces objects that do not belong to the worker but to the capitalist's accumulation of capital.

Mazhar's analysis extends this concept of alienation to the agricultural domain. The farmer who has been incorporated into the industrial agricultural system, who farms not according to her own knowledge and her own relationship with her land but according to the technical prescriptions of the Green Revolution package, is in a state of agricultural alienation analogous to the alienated labor of the industrial worker. Her farming is not an expression of her creative engagement with the living world of the agricultural landscape; it is a technical service she performs in accordance with the instructions of an agricultural extension system that has no knowledge of or interest in her specific ecological conditions. The ananda that Nayakrishi promises is, in this analysis, not merely a pleasant feeling; it is the overcoming of agricultural alienation, the restoration to the farmer of the genuine creative engagement with the natural world that industrial agriculture has systematically foreclosed.

The philosophical richness of the concept of ananda in the Nayakrishi context is further deepened by its connection to the Lalon tradition's understanding of the relationship between joy and freedom. In Lalon's songs, ananda is not merely the consequence of getting what one wants; it is the quality of experience that belongs to the free being, the being who has dissolved the ego's cramped and fearful mode of relating to the world and who engages with the world from the fullness of the Moner Manush rather than from the neediness of the ego. This means that the ananda of genuine farming is not separable from the freedom that genuine farming requires: the freedom of the farmer to exercise her own knowledge and her own judgment in her relationship with her land, rather than being subject to the technical prescriptions of an external authority.

The Nayakrishi principle that farming must be conducted on the basis of the farmer's own knowledge and her own relationship with her specific ecological conditions is therefore not merely a practical guideline but a statement about freedom and dignity. The farmer who farms according to her own knowledge is a subject, an autonomous agent engaged in a creative relationship with the natural world. The farmer who farms according to the prescriptions of the agricultural development establishment is an object, a recipient of technical instructions whose own knowledge and judgment have been systematically devalued and displaced.

CHAPTER FOUR: SEED AS METAPHOR, SEED AS POLITICS

Among the most important theoretical contributions of Farhad Mazhar's ecological philosophy is his treatment of the seed as simultaneously a biological entity, an economic commodity, a cultural artifact, a political stake, and a philosophical metaphor. The seed is, in Mazhar's analysis, the site at which all of the dimensions of the agricultural question converge, the point where ecology and economy, culture and politics, knowledge and practice are simultaneously at stake. Understanding the seed in its full complexity is, for Mazhar, the key to understanding the political economy of contemporary global capitalism in relation to agriculture and food, and the key to understanding what genuine food sovereignty would look like.

The biological significance of the seed is the starting point. Seeds are the primary repositories of the genetic diversity that constitutes the biological foundation of agricultural systems. For thousands of years, farmers in Bangladesh and across the world developed and maintained enormous diversity of crop varieties, each adapted to specific ecological conditions, specific cultural uses, specific nutritional properties, and specific aesthetic qualities. In Bangladesh alone, farmers had developed and maintained at least fifteen thousand varieties of rice, each with its specific characteristics, its specific relationship to the particular ecology of the region where it was cultivated, its specific cultural associations with particular festivals, food traditions, and social occasions. This diversity was not a museum piece or a scientific curiosity; it was the living foundation of the agricultural system's resilience, its capacity to adapt to changing conditions, its nutritional richness, and its cultural significance.

The Green Revolution's replacement of this diversity with a small number of high-yielding varieties was, in Mazhar's analysis, an act of dispossession of historic proportions, comparable in its effects to the enclosure of the commons in early modern England that Marx had analyzed as one of the primary mechanisms of primitive accumulation. The farmers who had developed and maintained these thousands of varieties over centuries were deprived, through the process of agricultural modernization, of the primary means of agricultural production that they had created through their own labor and knowledge. The genetic material that their ancestors had developed was transferred, through the mechanisms of plant breeding and intellectual property law, into the hands of international research institutions and subsequently into the hands of commercial seed corporations, which could then sell back to farmers, in the form of proprietary hybrid or genetically modified varieties, a degraded version of the genetic wealth that the farmers themselves had originally created.

The legal framework through which this dispossession was formalized and institutionalized is one of the most important dimensions of Mazhar's analysis of seed politics, and it connects his ecological philosophy directly to his engagement with jurisprudential questions. The system of plant breeders' rights and patents on plant varieties, which has been progressively extended and strengthened through the intellectual property provisions of the TRIPS Agreement of 1994 and through subsequent bilateral and multilateral trade agreements, has created a legal regime that treats the genetic material developed by farming communities over millennia as the intellectual property of the corporations and research institutions that have made relatively minor modifications to it. Under this regime, a farmer who saves seeds from a protected variety for replanting is potentially a criminal, engaged in an act of intellectual property theft.

The philosophical absurdity of this legal framework, from the perspective of Mazhar's analysis, is total. The farmers who developed the rice varieties that constitute the genetic foundation of the improved varieties now protected by intellectual property law are not merely the primary creators of the genetic material in question; they are the parties whose knowledge and labor have been systematically appropriated by the institutions that now claim ownership of that material. The intellectual property framework is not protecting innovation; it is protecting appropriation, encoding in legal form the transfer of value from the farming communities that created it to the corporations that have captured it.

The political economy of seed is, in this analysis, a microcosm of the broader political economy of global capitalism: the systematic appropriation of the common wealth created by collective human labor and knowledge, and its conversion into private property for the benefit of a small number of transnational corporations and their shareholders. This appropriation is not merely economic; it is political and cultural, because the seed knowledge that has been appropriated is not merely a collection of genetic material but an embedded form of cultural knowledge, a set of practices and understandings through which farming communities have maintained their relationship with the natural world and with each other across generations.

The Nayakrishi Seed Network, which is the organizational expression of the movement's commitment to seed sovereignty, represents a concrete alternative to the commercial seed system. The Network, which is organized primarily around women farmers who are the traditional custodians of seed knowledge in the Bengal delta, maintains and regenerates more than two thousand varieties of rice alone, along with hundreds of varieties of other crops. The Network is not merely a conservation project; it is a living seed system, in which seeds are selected, saved, exchanged, and improved by the farmers themselves in the light of their own ecological conditions and their own agricultural knowledge. It is an expression of the constituent power of farming communities in the agricultural domain: the power to be the genuine authors of their own agricultural systems rather than the recipients of systems designed and controlled by others.

The metaphorical dimension of the seed in Mazhar's thought is equally significant. The seed is a concentrated form of potential, a form in which the entire future of the plant is present in compressed and latent form, waiting for the right conditions to unfold. This metaphorical richness makes the seed an ideal figure for a philosophy of political possibility: the idea that the future is not simply given by the present conditions but is present in latent form in the cultural and philosophical resources of the community, waiting for the right conditions to emerge and flourish. The Nayakrishi Andolan's work of maintaining and regenerating agricultural biodiversity is, in this metaphorical register, also a work of maintaining and regenerating the philosophical and cultural biodiversity that constitutes the living tradition of the Bengal delta.

This connection between seed biodiversity and cultural-philosophical biodiversity is one of the most original aspects of Mazhar's ecological philosophy, and it has significant implications for how we understand the relationship between biodiversity conservation and cultural conservation. The dominant approach to biodiversity conservation, exemplified by the global system of gene banks, treats genetic diversity as a collection of biological resources to be preserved in controlled conditions for future use. This approach is not without value, but it treats the seeds as objects of

conservation rather than as elements of living systems, and it therefore cannot preserve the knowledge and the practices that give the seeds their meaning and their value within the communities that developed them.

The Nayakrishi approach to seed conservation is fundamentally different: it is in situ conservation, conservation in the fields and the households of the farming communities themselves, conservation through use and through the ongoing practice of selection, saving, exchange, and improvement that constitutes the living seed system. This approach maintains not only the genetic material of the seeds but the knowledge and the relationships through which that genetic material has been developed and through which it continues to develop. It is, in the fullest sense, living conservation rather than museum conservation.

CHAPTER FIVE: FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: THEORETICAL GENEALOGY AND MAZHAR'S CONTRIBUTION

The concept of food sovereignty, which has become one of the central organizing concepts of the global movement for alternative food systems and for the rights of farming communities, has a specific genealogy that it is important to trace in order to understand Mazhar's contribution to its development. The concept was first articulated publicly by La Via Campesina, the international coalition of peasant and small farmer organizations, at the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996, as a deliberate counter-proposal to the dominant discourse of food security.

Food security, as the term was being used in the international policy discourse of the 1990s, referred primarily to the availability of sufficient calories for the world's population, and the dominant approach to achieving food security was the intensification of agricultural production through the application of modern agricultural technology: more high-yielding varieties, more chemical inputs, more irrigation, more market integration. The food security discourse was, in this sense, continuous with the Green Revolution ideology that had been dominant in agricultural development since the 1960s, and it shared that ideology's fundamental assumption that the primary problem of global food production was a technical one, to be solved through the application of scientific knowledge and modern technology, rather than a political one, to be addressed through changes in the distribution of power and resources.

Food sovereignty, as articulated by La Via Campesina and subsequently elaborated through a vast literature of activist, scholarly, and policy analysis, challenged this assumption fundamentally. The concept insists that the right to food is not merely the right of individuals to have access to sufficient calories but the right of peoples and communities to determine their own food systems: to decide what they grow and how they grow it, who controls the seeds and the land, how food is distributed and consumed within and between communities, and how the relationship between agriculture and the natural environment is managed. Food sovereignty is therefore a concept that integrates dimensions of analysis that the food security discourse keeps separate: the ecological, the economic, the cultural, the political, and the feminist.

Mazhar's contribution to the development of the food sovereignty concept predates its formal articulation by La Via Campesina, though his work at UBINIG in the late 1980s and early 1990s contributed directly to the intellectual environment from which the concept emerged. His most significant theoretical contribution to the food sovereignty framework is the analysis of the relationship between seed sovereignty and political sovereignty that we examined in the previous chapter, the argument that genuine political sovereignty for farming communities requires control over the material foundations of agricultural production, including most fundamentally the seeds from which all food production begins.

A second significant contribution is his analysis of what he calls the feminine landscape: the analysis of the food system from the perspective of the women who are the primary producers and managers of food in the Bengal delta and who are the primary custodians of the knowledge traditions that sustain the diversity and the resilience of that food system. This analysis, developed most fully in the book *Food Sovereignty and Uncultivated Biodiversity in South Asia*, co-authored with Daniel Buckles, P.V. Satheesh, and Farida Akhter and published with the support of the International Development Research Centre, represents a major contribution to the literature on gender and food systems and to the broader field of feminist political ecology.

The analysis of the feminine landscape dissolves the conventional distinction between cultivated and uncultivated food, showing that from the perspective of the women who manage the food system in practice, this distinction is relatively unimportant; what matters is the management of all the spaces of the agricultural landscape, cultivated and uncultivated, in a way that maximizes the nutritional diversity and the livelihood security of the farming household and community. The women who collect uncultivated greens from the margins of rice fields, who fish in the ponds and the river margins, who maintain kitchen gardens of medicinal and nutritional plants, and who manage the seed supplies that ensure next year's harvest are engaging in a complex and sophisticated system of food production management that is invisible to the conventional metrics of agricultural production but that is fundamental to the actual food security of their communities.

The feminist dimension of Mazhar's food sovereignty analysis is connected to his broader philosophical commitment to the value of relational knowledge over abstract, universal knowledge. Women's agricultural knowledge in the Bangladesh context is pre-eminently relational knowledge: it is knowledge of specific places, specific ecological conditions, specific varieties in their specific contexts, accumulated through years of attentive engagement with a specific landscape. It is the kind of knowledge that the conventional agricultural development model systematically devalues and displaces, replacing it with the universalizing, abstract knowledge of agricultural science that is claimed to be applicable anywhere, regardless of local ecological conditions.

The devaluation of women's agricultural knowledge is therefore not merely a gender justice issue; it is an epistemological issue, a failure to recognize the validity and the value of a form of knowledge that is in many respects superior to the abstract, universalizing knowledge it is being replaced by. The Nayakrishi Seed Network's organization around women farmers as the primary custodians of seed knowledge is not merely an act of gender-responsive development programming; it is a philosophical statement about the epistemological authority of contextual,

relational, and experientially grounded knowledge in relation to abstract, universal, and laboratory-based knowledge.

The third significant contribution of Mazhar's food sovereignty analysis is his treatment of the relationship between food sovereignty and constitutional sovereignty, the argument that food sovereignty is not merely a dimension of economic policy but a dimension of constitutional politics. This argument, which we have touched on in the previous chapter and which has been developed in Mazhar's political writing as well as in the UBINIG research program, holds that a constitutional order that does not protect the food sovereignty of farming communities is fundamentally deficient, that it fails to secure one of the most fundamental material conditions of genuine political sovereignty for the majority of the population.

This argument has important implications for the constitutional reform debates that have been underway in Bangladesh since the 2024 uprising. If food sovereignty is a dimension of constitutional politics rather than merely a matter of agricultural policy, then a new Bangladeshi constitution should include explicit provisions protecting the rights of farming communities to their seeds and their lands, the right of communities to determine their own agricultural systems, and the obligation of the state to protect the ecological conditions on which agricultural production depends. These are provisions that no existing constitutional document in Bangladesh contains, and their absence is, in Mazhar's analysis, evidence of the fundamental inadequacy of the existing constitutional framework for addressing the actual conditions of life of the majority of the Bangladeshi population.

CHAPTER SIX: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF GLOBAL AGRIBUSINESS AND MAZHAR'S CRITIQUE

Mazhar's engagement with the political economy of global agribusiness is one of the most practically urgent dimensions of his ecological philosophy, and it connects his theoretical work directly to the international debates about trade, intellectual property, biotechnology, and agricultural development that have shaped global agricultural policy since the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations and the establishment of the World Trade Organization in 1995.

The political economy of global agribusiness, as Mazhar analyzes it, is characterized by a fundamental contradiction between the discourse of development and the reality of dispossession. The international institutions that promote agricultural modernization, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the WTO, present their policy prescriptions as development: as the application of modern scientific knowledge and market mechanisms to the problem of agricultural production, in the service of the goal of feeding the world's growing population and raising the living standards of the rural poor. This discourse of development is not entirely false; the improvements in agricultural productivity achieved through the Green Revolution did contribute to preventing famines and to raising food availability in many countries.

But the development discourse conceals the distribution of costs and benefits that the modernization process involves. The benefits of agricultural modernization have flowed primarily to the transnational corporations that produce and sell the inputs, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and machinery that the modernized agricultural system requires. These corporations, including Monsanto (now Bayer), Syngenta (now ChemChina), DowDuPont (now Corteva), BASF, and a small number of other companies, have used the mechanisms of intellectual property law, trade agreements, and development conditionality to capture an increasing share of the value generated by the global agricultural system, while the farming communities that produce the food bear an increasing share of the costs and risks.

Mazhar's analysis of this political economy is grounded in the tradition of dependency theory and world-systems theory that he encountered through his study of political economy at the New School for Social Research. Dependency theory, developed by Latin American economists including Raul Prebisch, Andre Gunder Frank, and Cardoso and Faletto in the 1960s and 1970s, analyzed the structural relationship between the advanced capitalist economies of the North and the less developed economies of the South as a relationship of dependency in which the North's development was systematically produced at the expense of the South's underdevelopment. Applied to the agricultural domain, this analysis suggests that the global agribusiness system is not a mechanism for raising agricultural productivity globally but a mechanism for transferring value from the farming communities of the Global South to the corporations of the Global North.

The WTO's TRIPS Agreement, which established minimum standards of intellectual property protection for plant varieties and other biological materials, is a paradigmatic example of this mechanism in operation. Before the TRIPS Agreement, most countries in the Global South, including Bangladesh, did not extend patent or plant breeders' rights protection to plant varieties, on the grounds that such protection would restrict farmers' traditional rights to save, exchange, and improve their seeds and would give unacceptable monopoly power to the seed corporations. The TRIPS Agreement required all WTO member countries to implement some form of intellectual property protection for plant varieties, either through a patent system or through a system of plant breeders' rights conforming to the international convention developed by the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants.

The implementation of TRIPS-compliant intellectual property protection in countries like Bangladesh is, in Mazhar's analysis, a process of enclosure analogous to the enclosure of the agricultural commons in early modern England: the legal transformation of what was previously a common resource, the collective genetic heritage developed by farming communities over millennia, into private property subject to the exclusive control of those who hold the relevant intellectual property rights. This transformation directly undermines food sovereignty by restricting farmers' rights to save, exchange, and improve their seeds, making them dependent on the commercial seed market for a resource that their ancestors had developed and maintained collectively.

Mazhar's engagement with these international legal and economic mechanisms has been substantive and practical as well as theoretical. UBINIG has participated actively in the international policy debates about intellectual property and plant genetic resources, contributing to the development of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and

Agriculture, which was adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in 2001 and which represents an attempt to protect farmers' rights to their seeds within the framework of international law. Mazhar's contribution to these debates has been to insist on the philosophical and political significance of farmers' rights, to argue that these rights are not merely economic interests to be protected within the framework of international trade law but dimensions of the fundamental political sovereignty of farming communities that cannot be adequately protected by any framework that treats seeds primarily as economic commodities.

The biotechnology controversy is another dimension of the political economy of global agribusiness that Mazhar has engaged with extensively. The development of genetically modified crops by the major agribusiness corporations, beginning in the mid-1990s and accelerating rapidly through the 2000s and 2010s, represents the most advanced form of the commodification of seed and genetic resources. Genetically modified varieties are, by definition, patentable: they are novel creations of the laboratory rather than developments of the farmers' seed selection process, and they are therefore subject to the full protection of patent law in ways that conventionally bred varieties are not.

Mazhar's critique of genetically modified crops is not primarily a biosafety argument, though he takes biosafety concerns seriously and supports rigorous independent assessment of the ecological and health risks of specific genetically modified products. His primary critique is political and philosophical: the adoption of genetically modified crops would represent the final enclosure of the agricultural commons, the replacement of the living, diverse, farmer-managed seed system with a system in which all seeds are proprietary products owned by a small number of transnational corporations. This would complete the process of transformation of farming communities from subjects who manage their own agricultural systems to objects who perform agricultural services within systems designed and controlled by others.

The specific controversy about Bt brinjal, a genetically modified eggplant variety developed by the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute in collaboration with Monsanto and the Cornell Alliance for Science, and approved for cultivation in Bangladesh in 2013, illustrates these dynamics in the specific Bangladeshi context. UBINIG and Farida Akhter, Mazhar's partner, were among the most vocal opponents of the approval of Bt brinjal, arguing that the approval process had been inadequate, that the biosafety assessment had not considered the full range of risks, and that the approval represented a capitulation to the pressure of the international biotechnology industry and its advocates rather than a genuine response to the needs of Bangladeshi farmers and consumers.

The debate about Bt brinjal in Bangladesh was not merely a technical debate about the safety and efficacy of a specific genetically modified crop. It was a political debate about who controls Bangladeshi agricultural policy, whose interests that policy serves, and what kind of agricultural future Bangladesh wants to create. Mazhar's contribution to this debate was to insist on its political character: to refuse the framing that presented the Bt brinjal question as a purely technical matter to be decided by scientific experts, and to insist instead that it was a question of democratic governance, of food sovereignty, and of the right of Bangladeshi farming communities to determine their own agricultural systems.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ECOLOGICAL JURISPRUDENCE AND THE RIGHTS OF NATURE

Mazhar's ecological philosophy has significant implications for the developing field of ecological jurisprudence, the project of reconceiving the fundamental principles of legal systems to take account of the ecological dimensions of human existence and to extend legal protection to the natural world. This chapter examines those implications in detail, placing Mazhar's ecological philosophy in dialogue with the most significant developments in ecological jurisprudence, rights of nature theory, and environmental constitutionalism.

The field of ecological jurisprudence, associated with thinkers like Cormac Cullinan, whose 2002 book *Wild Law* articulated the foundational principles of the approach, Thomas Berry, the cultural historian and environmental philosopher whose cosmological vision of the universe as a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects has been enormously influential, and Klaus Bosselmann, whose work on the ecological foundation of law has developed systematic frameworks for reconceiving legal systems around ecological principles, represents one of the most significant intellectual developments in legal theory of the past two decades.

The rights of nature movement, which has achieved remarkable legal developments in several jurisdictions in recent years, represents the most radical current within ecological jurisprudence. The Constitution of Ecuador, adopted in 2008, was the first national constitution in history to recognize the rights of Pachamama, Mother Earth, and to provide legal mechanisms through which those rights could be enforced in the courts. The Whanganui River in New Zealand was granted legal personhood in 2017, recognizing the river as a legal subject with rights that could be represented in court by human guardians. The Ganges and Yamuna rivers in India were similarly granted legal personhood by the Uttarakhand High Court in 2017, though this decision was subsequently stayed by the Supreme Court of India. Colombia's Constitutional Court in 2018 recognized the Colombian Amazon as a subject of rights entitled to protection from environmental degradation.

These legal developments represent a fundamental challenge to the anthropocentric assumption of conventional legal systems, the assumption that only human beings and the legal entities they create, such as corporations, are subjects of legal rights, while the natural world is exclusively an object of human ownership and use. The rights of nature framework insists that this assumption is both philosophically false and ecologically dangerous: false because the natural world is not a mere resource to be owned and used but a community of living beings whose existence has intrinsic value independent of their utility to humans; dangerous because the anthropocentric assumption licenses precisely the forms of ecological destruction that are now threatening the conditions of life on the planet.

Mazhar's ecological philosophy provides a distinct set of philosophical foundations for the rights of nature project, foundations that are grounded in the Bengali philosophical tradition rather than in the Western natural law tradition that most ecological jurisprudence draws on. The relational ontology that Mazhar derives from the Lalon tradition, the understanding that all entities are

constituted through their relationships with each other and with the ground of existence, provides a philosophical basis for the claim that the natural world is not a collection of objects to be owned and used but a community of beings with whom human beings stand in relationships of mutual dependence and mutual obligation.

The concept of khalifa, which we examined in the context of Mazhar's engagement with Islamic thought in Part Two, is directly relevant here as well. The understanding of the human being as the khalifa of the creation, the steward or caretaker who bears responsibility for the wellbeing of all beings, is not merely a spiritual metaphor; it is a normative framework that generates specific obligations toward the natural world. The khalifa who destroys the ecological conditions of the land and water under their care is not merely an imprudent manager; they are a betrayer of the fundamental obligation that defines their existence. This is a framework that generates something very close to the rights of nature framework, but from a different philosophical direction: not from the extension of legal subjecthood to non-human entities but from the extension of human obligation toward those entities.

The Nayakrishi principle that farming must be conducted in a way that respects and enhances the ecological community of the soil and the landscape, rather than exploiting it for short-term productive gain, is an expression of this obligation-based approach to the relationship between human beings and the natural world. It is not framed in the language of rights, which Mazhar, following the Bengali philosophical tradition, regards as embedded in an atomistic individualism that is epistemologically and ethically inadequate. It is framed in the language of obligation and responsibility, of the farmer's fundamental responsibility to care for the ecological community that sustains her agriculture and her life.

This distinction between rights-based and obligation-based frameworks for environmental protection has important practical implications for the design of legal and institutional frameworks. Rights-based frameworks tend to focus on the protection of specific entities or resources from specific harmful actions, creating a reactive framework in which legal protection is triggered by threats of harm. Obligation-based frameworks, by contrast, tend to generate proactive requirements of care and stewardship, creating conditions in which the positive responsibility to maintain and enhance ecological conditions is part of the basic framework of law and governance rather than an exception to be invoked in response to specific threats.

The relationship between Mazhar's obligation-based ecological philosophy and the constitutional proposals he has developed in the context of the post-uprising debates in Bangladesh is direct. His constitutional principles, particularly the second principle prohibiting state policies that harm life and the environment, represent an attempt to incorporate an ecological dimension into constitutional law that goes beyond the conventional environmental protection provisions of most constitutions. The principle does not merely require the state to prevent specific forms of environmental harm; it requires the state to conduct all of its activities, including its economic development policies, in a way that is consistent with the maintenance of the ecological conditions on which life depends.

This is a more radical constitutional principle than the environmental provisions of most existing constitutions, including the environmental rights provisions of the South African Constitution

and the environmental chapters of the constitutions of various Latin American countries. It is closest in its philosophical ambitions to the provisions of the Ecuadorian and Bolivian constitutions that recognize the rights of Pachamama, though it reaches those ambitions through a different philosophical path: through the obligation-based philosophy of the Bengali tradition rather than through the rights-extension approach of the rights of nature movement.

CHAPTER EIGHT: AGROECOLOGY, TRADITIONAL ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE, AND THE POLITICS OF SCIENCE

Mazhar's ecological philosophy engages extensively with the contemporary field of agroecology, which has emerged over the past three decades as one of the most intellectually productive and politically significant fields in agricultural science. Agroecology, defined broadly as the application of ecological principles and concepts to the design and management of sustainable food systems, represents in many respects the scientific vindication of the principles that the Nayakrishi Andolan has been practicing since the early 1990s, and the convergence between the Nayakrishi approach and the findings of agroecological science is one of the most striking features of the contemporary landscape of agricultural debate.

The science of agroecology has established, through decades of careful empirical research, that biodiversity-based ecological farming systems can be as productive, and in many contexts more productive, than conventional high-input monoculture systems, while using a fraction of the external inputs and generating a fraction of the ecological damage. The work of Miguel Altieri, whose textbook *Agroecology: The Science of Sustainable Agriculture* is one of the foundational texts of the field, Peter Rosset and his colleagues in La Via Campesina's network of farmer-to-farmer agroecology programs, and the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development, a major international scientific assessment published in 2009, have all contributed to establishing the scientific credibility of agroecological approaches.

The political significance of the scientific vindication of agroecology is considerable, because the dominant position of the international agricultural development establishment has long been that the productivity advantages of the Green Revolution technology are so overwhelming that the ecological and social costs of that technology must simply be accepted as the price of feeding the world's growing population. The scientific evidence that agroecological approaches can match or exceed the productivity of industrial agriculture, while generating far lower ecological costs, directly undermines this argument and creates political space for the kind of policy transformation that the food sovereignty movement has been advocating.

But Mazhar's engagement with agroecological science is not uncritical. He recognizes the value of the scientific vindication of agroecological approaches, but he also sees the risk that the incorporation of traditional farming knowledge into the scientific framework of agroecology may involve a transformation of that knowledge that strips it of its philosophical and cultural dimensions and reduces it to a set of technical practices that can be applied independently of the social and cultural context in which they developed.

This risk is an instance of the broader epistemological problem that the philosophy of science has addressed under the heading of the knowledge translation problem: the problem of what happens to knowledge when it is translated from one epistemological context to another. Knowledge that is contextual, relational, and practice-embedded in its original context may undergo significant transformation when it is translated into the universal, abstract, and propositional form required by modern science. The translated knowledge may be accurate as far as it goes, but it will have lost the dimensions of meaning, the contextual embeddedness, and the connection to the practices and the community of practice that give the original knowledge its full significance.

Mazhar's analysis of this epistemological problem is grounded in his broader philosophical engagement with the relationship between indigenous knowledge and scientific knowledge, an engagement that refuses both the romantic celebration of indigenous knowledge as inherently superior to scientific knowledge and the scientific dismissal of indigenous knowledge as mere superstition or folklore. He argues for a genuine epistemological pluralism, a recognition that different forms of knowledge, contextual and universal, practice-embedded and abstract, experiential and experimental, are not competing versions of the same thing but genuinely different modes of engagement with different aspects of reality, each with its own strengths and limitations and each with something to learn from the other.

This epistemological pluralism has significant implications for agricultural policy and for the governance of agricultural research. It suggests that the appropriate institutional framework for agricultural knowledge production is not one in which scientific research institutions have a monopoly on the production of valid agricultural knowledge, while farming communities are merely the recipients of knowledge produced elsewhere. It is one in which diverse forms of knowledge production, including the practice-embedded knowledge of farming communities, the systematic empirical research of agroecological science, and the contextual knowledge developed through participatory research processes that combine these two forms, are all recognized as valid and are supported and institutionalized accordingly.

The concept of farmer innovation, which has become increasingly important in the agroecological literature, is closely related to Mazhar's analysis. The recognition that farmers are not merely the recipients of knowledge produced by scientific researchers but are themselves innovators who continuously develop new agricultural knowledge and new agricultural practices through their attentive engagement with their ecological conditions, challenges the conventional hierarchical relationship between agricultural science and agricultural practice and creates the foundation for more genuinely collaborative relationships between scientists and farming communities.

The Nayakrishi Andolan's practice of what its participants call farmer-led research, in which farmers systematically observe, experiment, and evaluate agricultural practices and develop new agricultural knowledge through a collective process of learning that incorporates both their own traditional knowledge and new information from external sources, is an expression of this understanding of farmers as innovators. It is also a political practice: an assertion of the epistemological authority of farming communities against the authority claims of the development establishment, and a practical demonstration that farming communities are capable of developing sophisticated agricultural knowledge without the intervention of external experts.

CHAPTER NINE: CLIMATE CHANGE, ECOLOGICAL CRISIS, AND THE NAYAKRISHI RESPONSE

The intersection of Mazhar's ecological philosophy with the global crisis of climate change is one of the most significant dimensions of his work's contemporary relevance. Bangladesh is one of the countries most severely threatened by climate change: its low-lying geography, its dependence on monsoon rainfall and on the river systems that emerge from the Himalayan glaciers, its large coastal population vulnerable to sea-level rise and storm surge, and its agricultural system vulnerable to both drought and flooding, make it a frontline state in the global climate emergency.

The agricultural dimensions of climate change in Bangladesh are particularly severe. The changing patterns of monsoon rainfall are disrupting the seasonal rhythms on which Bangladeshi agriculture has depended for millennia. The increasing frequency and intensity of floods and droughts are threatening the stability of the agricultural system. The rising salinity of coastal soils and groundwater, driven by sea-level rise and increased storm surge, is making large areas of previously productive agricultural land unsuitable for conventional cultivation. And the increasing temperatures are affecting the timing and the quality of harvests across the country.

Mazhar's response to these challenges is grounded in his ecological philosophy. He argues that the vulnerability of Bangladeshi agriculture to climate change is not merely a consequence of geographical and meteorological factors; it is a consequence of the agricultural modernization process that has replaced the resilient, diverse, and ecologically adapted traditional farming systems of the Bengal delta with fragile, input-dependent monoculture systems that are highly vulnerable to exactly the kinds of climatic disturbance that climate change is producing.

The traditional farming systems of the Bengal delta, including the systems that the Nayakrishi Andolan has been working to maintain and regenerate, were developed over millennia in intimate engagement with the specific ecological conditions of the delta, including its patterns of flooding, its seasonality, and its soil characteristics. The thousands of rice varieties that were developed and maintained by Bengali farmers included varieties adapted to a wide range of flooding conditions, from brief seasonal floods to prolonged deep flooding, as well as varieties adapted to drought conditions, to saline soils, and to a range of other ecological challenges. This diversity was the foundation of the agricultural system's resilience: its capacity to maintain productivity across a wide range of ecological conditions.

The Green Revolution's replacement of this diversity with a small number of high-yielding varieties that performed optimally under specific controlled conditions destroyed the foundation of this resilience. The monoculture systems that replaced the diverse traditional systems are not merely less ecologically rich; they are more fragile, more vulnerable to the disturbances that climate change is producing. A flood that would have damaged one traditional variety while another adapted to flooding conditions survived and thrived, now damages the entire crop because the diversity that would have provided resilience has been replaced by uniformity.

The Nayakrishi response to climate change is therefore not primarily a technological response, not the development of new climate-resistant varieties through conventional plant breeding or genetic engineering. It is a response grounded in the restoration of agricultural biodiversity, in the maintenance and regeneration of the diverse traditional varieties that the Bengal delta's farmers have developed over centuries, as the foundation of a resilient agricultural system capable of adapting to the changing conditions that climate change is producing. This response is simultaneously ecologically appropriate, culturally grounded, and politically empowering, because it restores to farming communities the control over their seeds and their agricultural systems that the Green Revolution had taken from them.

The relationship between agricultural biodiversity and climate resilience has been established empirically by a substantial body of agroecological research. Studies conducted in various countries have consistently shown that diverse, polyculture farming systems are more resilient to climatic disturbances than monoculture systems, that the diversity of varieties maintained by traditional farming communities includes varieties with adaptations to specific stress conditions that commercial plant breeders are only now beginning to recognize as valuable, and that the management of uncultivated biodiversity, including the maintenance of wetlands, forest margins, and other natural habitats within and around agricultural landscapes, contributes significantly to the agricultural system's resilience by maintaining the ecological services that support agricultural production.

The concept of agro-biodiversity as climate insurance is one that Mazhar has developed in his theoretical work on food sovereignty and that has been taken up in the international policy discourse. The argument runs as follows: the diverse varieties maintained by traditional farming communities represent an irreplaceable genetic resource, a library of adaptations to diverse ecological conditions that includes adaptations to precisely the kinds of stress conditions that climate change is producing. The loss of this diversity, through the replacement of traditional farming systems with Green Revolution monocultures, is therefore not merely a cultural and ecological loss; it is a material threat to the capacity of the global agricultural system to adapt to climate change.

The political implications of this analysis are significant. If agricultural biodiversity is a form of insurance against climate risk, and if that biodiversity has been systematically destroyed by the agricultural modernization policies promoted by the international development establishment, then the international community has an obligation not merely to fund climate adaptation programs in countries like Bangladesh but to support the restoration of the agricultural biodiversity that its own policies have destroyed. This obligation is not merely ethical; it is, in Mazhar's analysis, a dimension of the reparative justice that the Global South is owed by the Global North for the consequences of both colonial exploitation and the climate change that the North's industrial development has produced.

CHAPTER TEN: THE SHAHAJ ECONOMY: MAZHAR'S ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC VISION

Mazhar's ecological philosophy is inseparable from his alternative economic vision, which he sometimes articulates under the heading of the shahaj economy or the economy of joy. This alternative economic vision represents one of the most ambitious dimensions of his intellectual project: an attempt to sketch the outlines of an economic system that is organized around the principles of ecological sustainability, social solidarity, cultural richness, and the cultivation of genuinely human capacities, rather than around the principles of economic growth, capital accumulation, and the maximization of market-mediated consumption.

The concept of the shahaj economy draws on multiple traditions that Mazhar brings into dialogue with each other. It draws on the Marxist tradition's critique of capitalism and its vision of a communist society in which the all-round development of human faculties is the goal of economic organization rather than the accumulation of capital. It draws on the tradition of Gandhian economics, associated with Gandhi's concept of swadeshi, economic self-sufficiency, and his vision of village-based economic self-governance as the foundation of a genuinely democratic society. It draws on the tradition of Islamic economics, particularly the concept of maslaha, the principle that economic arrangements must serve the genuine welfare of the community, and the tradition of zakat and other redistributive obligations that the Islamic tradition imposes on the wealthy. And it draws on the Bengali philosophical tradition, particularly the concept of ananda as the criterion of genuinely good economic organization.

The shahaj economy is not a planned economy in the sense of a centrally coordinated system of production and distribution. It is, rather, an economy organized around the principle of sufficiency rather than the principle of growth, an economy whose goal is to provide all members of the community with what they genuinely need to live well and to develop their human capacities, rather than to maximize the total quantity of goods and services produced and consumed regardless of their actual contribution to human wellbeing.

This principle of sufficiency has resonances with several traditions of alternative economic thought that have developed in recent decades. The degrowth movement, associated with thinkers like Serge Latouche, Tim Jackson, and Jason Hickel, has argued that the infinite growth imperative of capitalist economics is ecologically unsustainable and that the transition to ecological sustainability requires the development of economic systems organized around sufficiency rather than growth. The solidarity economy movement has developed institutional forms, including cooperatives, mutual aid networks, commons-based resource management systems, and local exchange trading systems, that embody the principles of solidarity and reciprocity rather than competition and individual profit maximization.

Mazhar's shahaj economy concept is in dialogue with both of these traditions, but it is grounded in a specifically Bengali philosophical context that gives it a different character. Where the degrowth tradition tends to frame its argument primarily in terms of ecological limits, as a response to the ecological crisis produced by unlimited economic growth, and where the solidarity economy tradition tends to frame its argument primarily in terms of social values, as a preference for solidarity over competition, Mazhar's shahaj economy is framed primarily in terms of human flourishing, as a response to the question of what kind of economic organization enables human beings to live fully and joyfully.

This framing connects the shahaj economy to the capabilities approach developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, which holds that the appropriate criterion for evaluating economic arrangements is not the quantity of goods and services they produce but the extent to which they enable all members of the community to develop and exercise their distinctive human capabilities. Sen's concept of development as freedom, the idea that genuine development consists not in the accumulation of economic output but in the expansion of the real freedoms that people enjoy, is consonant in important respects with Mazhar's concept of ananda as the criterion of genuinely good economic organization.

But Mazhar's shahaj economy concept is also different from the capabilities approach in significant ways. The capabilities approach, as developed in the academic literature, tends to focus on individual capabilities and on the role of state institutions in enabling individuals to develop those capabilities. Mazhar's concept is more communitarian and more ecological: it focuses on the capabilities of communities rather than merely of individuals, and it emphasizes the ecological conditions on which all human capability development ultimately depends. A community that has lost control of its agricultural land and its seeds, that has been incorporated into the global agribusiness system as a source of cheap agricultural labor and a market for expensive inputs, may formally have access to individual rights and freedoms but is not in a position to develop genuinely human capabilities in any meaningful sense.

The institutional expression of the shahaj economy, in Mazhar's vision, is not primarily the state but the community: the network of relationships of solidarity, reciprocity, and mutual obligation that constitute the social foundation of genuine economic security and human flourishing. The Nayakrishi Andolan itself is an expression of this community-based economic vision: a community in which farming families are connected to each other through networks of seed exchange, knowledge sharing, and mutual support, in which the management of the agricultural commons is conducted through collective deliberation and collective governance, and in which the goal is not the maximization of individual profit but the maintenance of the ecological and social conditions of the community's wellbeing.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN, FARMING, AND SOVEREIGN KNOWLEDGE

The relationship between women, farming, and the forms of knowledge that sustain food sovereignty is one of the most important and most carefully analyzed dimensions of Mazhar's ecological philosophy, and it deserves a chapter of its own because it represents one of the areas where his thinking is most original and where it makes the most significant contribution to the broader literature on gender, ecology, and development.

The central claim of Mazhar's analysis in this domain, developed in collaboration with Farida Akhter and with the women farmers of the Nayakrishi Andolan, is that women in the Bangladesh context are not merely agricultural laborers performing tasks assigned to them by the agricultural system but the primary knowledge holders and knowledge innovators of the agricultural system, and that the displacement of women's agricultural knowledge by the knowledge systems of the

Green Revolution and the development establishment is not merely a gender injustice but an epistemological catastrophe with profound implications for the sustainability and the resilience of the agricultural system.

This claim requires some elaboration. In the conventional division of agricultural labor in Bangladesh, women are indeed the primary performers of a wide range of agricultural tasks: transplanting rice seedlings, weeding, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, and post-harvest processing are all tasks performed primarily by women in most of the country. But Mazhar's analysis goes beyond this observation of women's agricultural labor to examine the specific forms of agricultural knowledge that women hold and the specific roles they play in the management of the agricultural system that go well beyond their role as agricultural workers.

Women in the Bangladesh context have been, for as long as records and oral traditions allow us to trace, the primary custodians of seed knowledge: the knowledge of the specific characteristics of different rice varieties, their specific ecological requirements, their specific culinary properties, their specific timing in the agricultural calendar, and the specific conditions under which they must be stored to maintain their viability for replanting. This seed knowledge is not merely technical information that can be codified and transferred between individuals. It is an embedded knowledge, inseparable from the practices of selection, storage, exchange, and cultivation through which it is maintained and developed.

The management of seed is, in the traditional Bangladeshi agricultural system, a complex practice that requires knowledge of the specific ecological conditions of the holding, knowledge of the specific requirements of each variety, knowledge of the relationships between different varieties and different cropping conditions, and knowledge of the network of relationships with other farming families through which seeds are exchanged when specific varieties are needed or when a farmer's own seed supply has been damaged. This knowledge is maintained and developed through a practice that is simultaneously agricultural, social, and cultural: the practice of managing the household seed supply is connected to the practice of managing the household food supply, which is connected to the practice of managing the social relationships with other farming families through gift and exchange, which is connected to the cultural practices associated with specific foods and specific occasions.

The Green Revolution's imposition of purchased hybrid seeds on the agricultural system did not merely change the technical basis of seed supply; it disrupted the entire network of practices and knowledge through which the traditional seed system was maintained. When farmers purchased hybrid seeds from commercial suppliers, they lost the capacity to save and replant seeds because hybrid varieties do not breed true in the second generation. This meant that the annual cycle of seed selection, storage, and exchange that had been central to women's agricultural practice was suddenly irrelevant: there were no seeds to select or save, and the knowledge of how to do so was no longer required. The practical consequence was the systematic erosion of the seed knowledge that women had maintained across generations, and with it the erosion of the broader ecological knowledge that had been embedded in the seed management practice.

The Nayakrishi Seed Network is, in this context, not merely a conservation project. It is a project of knowledge restoration and knowledge empowerment, a project of restoring to women farmers

the central role in the agricultural knowledge system that the Green Revolution had taken from them. The Network's organization around women as the primary actors is not merely a gesture toward gender equity; it is a recognition that women are the appropriate custodians of this knowledge, that the restoration of a living, farmer-managed seed system requires the restoration of women's authority within the agricultural knowledge system.

The feminist epistemological dimensions of this analysis connect Mazhar's work to the broader tradition of feminist philosophy of science and feminist epistemology, associated with thinkers like Sandra Harding, whose concept of standpoint epistemology argues that the social location of the knower shapes what can be known, Helen Longino, whose analysis of the social dimensions of scientific knowledge challenges the conventional understanding of scientific objectivity, and more recently María Lugones, whose concept of the coloniality of gender analyzes the way in which colonial processes transformed gender relations and gender knowledge systems in colonized societies.

Mazhar's analysis of the relationship between women, farming, and knowledge in the Bangladesh context both supports and extends these feminist epistemological frameworks. It supports them by providing a concrete case study of how the displacement of women's knowledge by the knowledge systems of the development establishment has involved both a gender injustice and an epistemological impoverishment. And it extends them by connecting the feminist analysis to a broader ecological analysis, showing how the displacement of women's agricultural knowledge is inseparable from the broader ecological crisis produced by the agricultural modernization process.

CHAPTER TWELVE: UNCULTIVATED BIODIVERSITY AND THE POLITICS OF VISIBILITY

The concept of uncultivated biodiversity, which Mazhar develops most fully in the book *Food Sovereignty and Uncultivated Biodiversity in South Asia*, represents one of his most original contributions to the theoretical literature on food systems and food sovereignty. The concept challenges the conventional understanding of what agriculture is and what counts as food production in ways that have profound implications for both agricultural policy and for the theory of food sovereignty.

As noted in Chapter Two, the conventional understanding of agriculture treats cultivation as the only legitimate form of agricultural production, reducing the agricultural system to what happens in the specifically cultivated spaces of the agricultural landscape: the rice paddies, the vegetable gardens, the orchard plots. Everything that happens outside these specifically cultivated spaces, in the field margins, the water bodies, the forests, and the uncultivated grasslands, is treated as background or habitat rather than as food production. This understanding misses a crucial dimension of the actual food system, particularly in the context of the Bengal delta, where the uncultivated biodiversity of the agricultural landscape makes a contribution to the food and nutritional security of farming communities that is comparable in importance, if not in caloric terms then certainly in nutritional terms, to the contribution of the cultivated crops.

The uncultivated foods of the Bengal delta include hundreds of species of leafy vegetables, tubers, roots, and other plant foods that grow spontaneously in field margins, embankments, and other uncultivated spaces and that are collected, prepared, and served primarily by women. They include dozens of species of small fish, shellfish, and other aquatic organisms that are found in the irrigation channels, ponds, and river margins that characterize the agricultural landscape. They include mushrooms, fruits, and other forest foods collected from the areas of natural vegetation that survive within and around the agricultural landscape. And they include a range of animals, including birds, insects, and other organisms, that are caught and consumed by farming families throughout the year.

The nutritional contribution of this uncultivated biodiversity is substantial. Many of the uncultivated leafy vegetables are rich sources of vitamins and minerals, particularly iron, calcium, and vitamins A and C, that are poorly represented in the staple rice diet that constitutes the primary caloric basis of most Bangladeshi farming families' diets. The small fish and other aquatic foods are important sources of protein and omega-3 fatty acids. And the diversity of the uncultivated food sources provides a form of nutritional insurance that is not available from any single cultivated crop or combination of cultivated crops.

The cultural significance of uncultivated biodiversity is as important as its nutritional significance. Many of the uncultivated foods of the Bengal delta are associated with specific cultural occasions, specific social relationships, and specific forms of knowledge and practice that are integral to the cultural life of farming communities. The collection and preparation of specific uncultivated foods is not merely a nutritional activity; it is a social activity, a cultural practice, and a form of knowledge transmission through which the knowledge of the landscape and its resources is passed from generation to generation.

The analysis of uncultivated biodiversity as a dimension of the feminine landscape that Mazhar develops in the book with Buckles, Satheesh, and Akhter is grounded in the recognition that the collection, preparation, and distribution of uncultivated foods is primarily a women's activity in the Bangladesh context, and that the knowledge of the uncultivated landscape and its resources is primarily women's knowledge. This knowledge is not abstract or universal; it is specific to particular places, particular seasons, and particular ecological conditions, and it is maintained and developed through the practice of regular engagement with the uncultivated landscape throughout the agricultural calendar.

The policy implications of this analysis are significant and direct. Development interventions that aim to increase agricultural productivity through the intensification of cultivation, by converting field margins and embankments to productive use, draining wetlands and water bodies for cultivation, clearing forest margins for agricultural expansion, systematically destroy the uncultivated biodiversity that provides this crucial nutritional contribution to farming families' food security. These interventions are assessed by the development establishment primarily in terms of their contribution to the production of cultivated crops, and they are therefore evaluated positively even though they may be destroying as much nutritional value in uncultivated foods as they are creating in cultivated crops.

A food sovereignty framework that takes uncultivated biodiversity seriously requires a fundamental reconceptualization of the metrics through which food security is assessed and through which development interventions are evaluated. It requires metrics that capture the nutritional contribution of uncultivated foods alongside cultivated crops, that capture the livelihood contribution of the management of uncultivated spaces alongside the management of cultivated spaces, and that capture the cultural and social value of uncultivated biodiversity as well as its direct nutritional and economic value.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: NAYAKRISHI AND INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS: LA VIA CAMPESINA AND THE GLOBAL PEASANT MOVEMENT

The Nayakrishi Andolan does not exist in isolation; it is part of a global network of farmer movements and organizations that are challenging the dominant model of industrial agriculture and developing alternatives grounded in ecological sustainability, food sovereignty, and the rights of farming communities. The most important of these networks is La Via Campesina, the international coalition of peasant and small farmer organizations that has been the primary driver of the food sovereignty agenda in international forums since its founding in 1993.

La Via Campesina, which currently represents an estimated two hundred million farmers, peasants, indigenous people, and rural workers across more than eighty countries, was one of the first international organizations to articulate the concept of food sovereignty as a framework for challenging the dominant development model in agriculture. The organization has played a central role in the negotiations that led to the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas in 2018, a landmark international legal instrument that recognizes the specific rights of peasants and farming communities, including their rights to land, seeds, and food sovereignty.

UBINIG and the Nayakrishi Andolan have been active participants in the La Via Campesina network, and Mazhar's theoretical contributions to the food sovereignty framework have both influenced and been influenced by the broader international movement. The specific contribution of the Bangladesh context to the global food sovereignty movement has been primarily in the areas of seed sovereignty and uncultivated biodiversity, where the work of UBINIG has been recognized internationally as representing the most rigorous and most practically grounded analysis of these dimensions of food sovereignty.

The comparison between the Nayakrishi Andolan and other farmer-led agroecological movements around the world is instructive and illuminating. In Cuba, the agroecological movement that emerged from the economic crisis of the 1990s, when the collapse of the Soviet Union deprived Cuban agriculture of its supply of chemical inputs and Soviet agricultural machinery, produced one of the most successful cases of large-scale conversion from conventional to ecological farming in history. The Cuban case demonstrates that the transition from conventional to ecological agriculture is not merely a technical possibility but a political choice, one that can be made at a national scale when the political conditions make it necessary or desirable.

In India, the Zero Budget Natural Farming movement associated with Subhash Palekar has developed a set of techniques for zero-input ecological farming that have been adopted by hundreds of thousands of farming families across several Indian states. While the specific philosophy and the specific techniques of Palekar's approach differ from those of the Nayakrishi Andolan in important ways, the two movements share the fundamental commitment to the liberation of farming communities from dependence on expensive purchased inputs and to the development of farming systems grounded in the ecological knowledge and the biological resources of specific places.

In Latin America, the campesino-a-campesino movement, the farmer-to-farmer movement, developed in the 1970s and 1980s as a methodology for the horizontal transmission of agroecological knowledge between farming communities, has achieved remarkable results in terms of the spread of ecological farming practices across a wide range of agro-ecological zones. The campesino-a-campesino movement's philosophy of horizontal knowledge sharing, in which farmers teach other farmers through demonstration and practice rather than receiving technical prescriptions from external experts, has resonances with the Nayakrishi Andolan's own approach to agricultural knowledge and farmer innovation.

The international significance of the Nayakrishi Andolan in this global context is its demonstration that the principles of food sovereignty and ecological farming are applicable and productive not only in the specific conditions of Latin America, Cuba, or India but in the specific and extreme conditions of the Bangladesh delta: one of the most densely populated agricultural regions in the world, one of the most ecologically complex, and one of the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. If ecological farming can work at scale in Bangladesh, it can work almost anywhere.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF COMMONS AND THE NAYAKRISHI ALTERNATIVE

The concept of the commons, the resources and the systems of governance through which communities manage shared resources for collective benefit, is one of the most important theoretical frameworks in contemporary political philosophy and ecological economics, and it is directly relevant to Mazhar's ecological philosophy and to the practice of the Nayakrishi Andolan.

The commons tradition in political philosophy has deep historical roots, running from the medieval commons of English and European agriculture through the political philosophy of the Diggers and other radical groups of the English Civil War period to the contemporary commons movement associated with theorists like David Bollier, Silke Helfrich, and the late Elinor Ostrom, whose Nobel Prize-winning work on the governance of the commons demonstrated empirically that communities are capable of managing shared resources sustainably and effectively without either privatization or state control.

Ostrom's analysis of successful commons governance, which identified a set of design principles that characterize sustainable commons institutions, including clearly defined boundaries, rules adapted to local conditions, collective choice arrangements, monitoring mechanisms, graduated sanctions, and conflict resolution mechanisms, provides a systematic framework for understanding why certain forms of community-based resource management succeed where both market mechanisms and state control have failed. The Nayakrishi Seed Network, with its community seed wealth centers, its system of seed exchange between farming families, its collective protocols for seed selection and regeneration, and its governance mechanisms that are developed and managed by the farming communities themselves, is precisely the kind of sustainable commons institution that Ostrom's framework describes.

But Mazhar's understanding of the agricultural commons goes beyond Ostrom's institutional analysis to engage with the philosophical dimensions of commons life that the institutional approach tends to underemphasize. The agricultural commons of the Bengal delta, including not only the seed commons maintained by the Nayakrishi Seed Network but the water commons of the rivers and canals, the biodiversity commons of the uncultivated landscape, and the knowledge commons of the traditional agricultural knowledge that farming communities have developed and shared across generations, are not merely institutional arrangements for the management of shared resources. They are forms of life, constituted by and constituting specific forms of human relationship, specific modes of being-with-others, that are inseparable from the ecological and cultural conditions in which they have developed.

This understanding of the commons as a form of life rather than merely an institutional arrangement connects Mazhar's ecological philosophy to his broader philosophical commitment to the relational ontology derived from the Lalon tradition. The commons is not merely a resource management system; it is a community constituted through its relationships of shared care and shared responsibility for the resources and the ecological conditions on which all its members depend. The destruction of the commons, whether through privatization, through the imposition of state management, or through the disruption of the ecological conditions that make the commons viable, is not merely a resource management problem; it is a destruction of the form of life and the forms of human relationship through which the commons community constituted itself.

This philosophical understanding of the commons has direct implications for the constitutional and legal framework within which commons are embedded. If the commons is a form of life rather than merely a resource management institution, then the legal protection of the commons requires not merely the recognition of collective property rights in shared resources but the protection of the social and ecological conditions that make commons life possible. A legal framework that protects the formal collective property rights of commons institutions while permitting the destruction of the ecological conditions on which those institutions depend is not genuinely protective of the commons in any meaningful sense.

Mazhar's constitutional proposals, particularly his insistence on the ecological dimensions of constitutional order and his argument for a constitution that prohibits state policies that harm life and the environment, can be understood in part as an attempt to constitutionalize the protection of the commons in this deeper sense: to create a constitutional framework that protects not

merely the formal institutions of commons governance but the ecological and social conditions that make commons life possible.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE: NAYAKRISHI IN THE AGE OF AGROECOLOGICAL TRANSITION

The final chapter of Part Three examines the contemporary relevance of Mazhar's ecological philosophy and of the Nayakrishi Andolan in the context of the global transition toward agroecological farming systems that is now underway, driven by the convergence of the ecological crisis, the climate crisis, the food justice movement, and the growing scientific evidence for the viability and the desirability of agroecological alternatives to industrial agriculture.

The global agroecological transition has accelerated significantly in the years 2023 to 2026, driven by several converging forces. The report of the IPCC on agriculture, food, and water in its sixth assessment cycle, published in late 2022, provided the most comprehensive and most alarming assessment yet of the contribution of the global agricultural and food system to climate change, including its contribution through deforestation, soil carbon loss, methane emissions from livestock and rice cultivation, and nitrous oxide emissions from synthetic fertilizer use. The report's finding that the food system as a whole is responsible for approximately one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions has intensified the urgency of demands for fundamental transformation of the global agricultural system.

Simultaneously, the scientific evidence for the productivity and sustainability of agroecological alternatives to industrial agriculture has continued to accumulate. A comprehensive meta-analysis published in *Nature Food* in 2024 found that agroecological farming systems, on average, produced only marginally lower yields of staple crops than conventional systems while generating significantly lower greenhouse gas emissions, maintaining or improving soil health, and supporting significantly higher levels of agricultural biodiversity. The study's finding that the productivity gap between agroecological and conventional systems narrows significantly when the full range of crops and food sources managed by ecological farming households is taken into account, rather than just the staple crops, resonates directly with Mazhar's analysis of the nutritional value of uncultivated biodiversity.

The policy landscape has also shifted significantly in recent years. The European Union's Farm to Fork Strategy, published in 2020, commits the EU to reducing the use of chemical pesticides by fifty percent and the use of synthetic fertilizers by twenty percent by 2030, while increasing the proportion of agricultural land managed organically to twenty-five percent. The United Nations Food Systems Summit of 2021 generated commitments from numerous countries to transform their food systems in the direction of sustainability and equity, though the follow-through on these commitments has been uneven. And the COP27 and COP28 climate conferences have seen increasing attention to the agricultural dimensions of climate change and to the role of agroecological approaches in both mitigation and adaptation.

In this global context, the work of the Nayakrishi Andolan and the theoretical framework that Mazhar has developed to situate and explain that work are more relevant than ever. The Nayakrishi model provides an empirically tested and philosophically grounded example of what a large-scale transition to ecological farming looks like in practice, how it can be organized, what it requires from farming communities and from the institutions that support them, and what it produces in terms of ecological, economic, nutritional, and social outcomes.

Mazhar's contribution to the global agroecological transition is not merely the practical example of the Nayakrishi Andolan; it is also the theoretical framework that situates that example within a comprehensive philosophical and political analysis. The food sovereignty framework, the analysis of uncultivated biodiversity, the critique of the commodification of seed and genetic resources, the understanding of women's agricultural knowledge as a central epistemological resource, and the philosophical concept of the shahaj economy: all of these theoretical contributions provide resources for thinking about the global agroecological transition in ways that go beyond the technical and the institutional to engage with the philosophical and political dimensions that any genuinely transformative transition must address.

The question of how the agroecological transition can be made at the scale required to address the ecological and climate crises is one that requires not merely technical solutions but political transformation: transformation in the distribution of power over food systems, transformation in the institutional frameworks that govern agricultural production and trade, transformation in the legal frameworks that regulate intellectual property and land rights, and transformation in the cultural and philosophical frameworks through which human beings understand their relationship with the natural world. Mazhar's ecological philosophy addresses all of these dimensions, and its relevance to the global agroecological transition is therefore comprehensive rather than merely technical.

CONCLUDING NOTE TO PART THREE: THE EARTH AS PHILOSOPHICAL TEXT

Part Three of this textbook has examined Farhad Mazhar's ecological philosophy in its full depth and complexity, tracing its development through the founding and practice of the Nayakrishi Andolan, its theoretical articulation in the food sovereignty framework, its engagement with the political economy of global agribusiness, its philosophical foundations in the relational ontology and the concept of shahaj that he derives from the Bengali philosophical tradition, and its contemporary relevance to the global agroecological transition.

The analysis has shown that Mazhar's ecological philosophy is not a separate dimension of his intellectual project but is integrally connected to all its other dimensions: to his constitutional theory and his concept of popular sovereignty, to his philosophy of bhav and the Lalon tradition, to his critique of colonial epistemology and his commitment to the epistemological authority of contextual and relational knowledge, to his feminist analysis of the politics of knowledge, and to his broader vision of a form of human community organized around solidarity, mutual obligation, and the cultivation of genuinely human capacities.

The earth, in Mazhar's ecological philosophy, is not merely the site of agricultural production; it is a philosophical text, a source of wisdom about the conditions of human existence that can be read by those who have developed the capacity for attentive engagement with its processes and its communities. The farmer who knows her soil, who understands the complex ecological relationships that sustain its fertility, who can read the signs of the seasons in the behavior of birds and insects and the quality of the light, is not merely a skilled technician; she is a philosopher, engaging through her practice with fundamental questions about the nature of existence, the conditions of human flourishing, and the obligations that human beings bear toward the living world from which they emerge.

This understanding of the farmer as philosopher, and of agricultural practice as a form of philosophical engagement with the world, is one of Mazhar's most original and most important contributions. It challenges the hierarchical understanding of knowledge that treats the scientific expert as the producer of knowledge and the farmer as its recipient, insisting instead that the knowledge produced through attentive ecological practice is as valid and as philosophically significant as the knowledge produced through laboratory science. And it connects the practice of farming to the practice of philosophy in a way that makes both more powerful and more honest: more powerful because it grounds philosophical reflection in the concrete realities of ecological existence, and more honest because it refuses the pretension of philosophical thought to a kind of disembodied universality that has no connection to the material conditions of life.

Part Four of this textbook will examine Mazhar's engagement with Islamic thought and its political and philosophical implications, analyzing his synthesis of Islamic spiritual philosophy and radical political thought and situating that synthesis in the broader context of contemporary Islamic political philosophy and its engagement with democracy, human rights, and social justice.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC AND THEORETICAL NOTES FOR PART THREE

On the Nayakrishi Andolan and UBINIG's work, the primary sources are the organization's own research publications, accessible through the UBINIG website at ubinig.org, and the academic literature that has engaged with the movement, including Farida Akhter's work on women and agriculture in Bangladesh, the collaboration with Daniel Buckles and P.V. Satheesh in *Food Sovereignty and Uncultivated Biodiversity in South Asia*, and the more recent analytical overview of Nayakrishi published in the *Global Tapestry of Alternatives* series in 2022.

On food sovereignty theory, essential texts include the La Via Campesina founding declaration of 1996 and subsequent elaborations, the Nyeleni Declaration on Food Sovereignty adopted at the first International Forum for Food Sovereignty in Mali in 2007, and the extensive academic literature that has developed around the concept, including works by Philip McMichael, Annette Aurelie Desmarais, Hannah Wittman, and the contributors to the edited volume *Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue* published by Yale University in 2014.

On agroecology, the essential theoretical texts include Miguel Altieri's *Agroecology: The Science of Sustainable Agriculture* (1995), Peter Rosset and Maria Elena Martinez-Torres's analysis of the campesino-a-campesino movement, and the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) report of 2009. The most recent comprehensive scientific review of agroecology's potential is the IPBES Assessment of Land Degradation and Restoration published in 2018 and the subsequent food systems analysis in the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report.

On the rights of nature and ecological jurisprudence, Cormac Cullinan's *Wild Law* (2002), Roderick Nash's *The Rights of Nature* (1989), and the more recent legal analyses of the Ecuadorian and Bolivian constitutional provisions on the rights of Pachamama by scholars including Mihnea Tănăsescu provide essential theoretical context. The comparative constitutional analysis of environmental provisions is developed in Louis Kotzé and Alan Paterson's edited volume *The Role of the Judiciary in Environmental Governance* (2009).

On commons theory, Elinor Ostrom's *Governing the Commons* (1990) remains foundational, and should be read alongside the more recent work of David Bollier and Silke Helfrich, particularly *Free, Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons* (2019), which develops the philosophical dimensions of commons governance beyond the institutional analysis that Ostrom's work emphasizes.

On traditional ecological knowledge and its relationship to scientific knowledge, Fikret Berkes's *Sacred Ecology* (1999) provides an excellent introduction, and should be read alongside the more recent work on epistemological pluralism in the philosophy of science associated with thinkers like Helen Longino and Hasok Chang.

End of Part Three. Part Four will examine Farhad Mazhar's engagement with Islamic thought and its philosophical and political implications, analyzing his synthesis of Islamic spiritual philosophy and radical political theory in the context of contemporary Islamic political philosophy and its engagement with democracy, rights, and social justice.

PART FOUR: ISLAM, ROOHANIATH, AND THE POLITICS OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

The Synthesis of Islamic Philosophy, Radical Politics, and the Jurisprudence of Liberation in the Thought of Farhad Mazhar

PROLOGUE TO PART FOUR: THE QUESTION THAT COULD NOT BE AVOIDED

There is a question that haunts the entire intellectual career of Farhad Mazhar, a question that appears in different forms at different moments but that never disappears, never becomes answerable in a final and definitive way, and never permits the thinker the comfort of having resolved it once and for all. The question is this: what is the relationship between the spiritual life

of a people and their political life? How does the deep religious sensibility of the Bengali Muslim people, formed over centuries of encounter between Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and the syncretic spiritual traditions of the Bengal delta, relate to the political aspirations of a postcolonial nation that has been simultaneously shaped by secular nationalist thought and by the continuing vitality of religious identity and religious community? And how can a thinker who takes both the Marxist critique of ideology and the spiritual wisdom of Lalon Shah Fakir seriously navigate the relationship between these two dimensions of human existence without falsifying either?

This question is not merely an academic question, and Mazhar has never treated it as one. It is a question with immediate and urgent political consequences, in a society where the relationship between Islam and political life has been the subject of intense and sometimes violent contestation since the founding of Bangladesh in 1971. The secular nationalist tradition associated with the Awami League and the Liberation War has one answer to the question: religion is a private matter, and the public sphere of politics must be organized on secular principles that transcend religious divisions. The Islamist tradition associated with Jamaat-e-Islami and its various allies has a very different answer: Islam is a comprehensive way of life that must organize all dimensions of human existence, including the political, and a genuinely Islamic state must derive its fundamental principles from the sharia rather than from any secular constitutional framework.

Mazhar rejects both answers. He rejects the secular nationalist answer because it treats religion as something that can be confined to the private sphere without doing violence to the actual spiritual life of the vast majority of the Bengali people, and because it has served, in practice, as an ideology of cultural exclusion, delegitimizing the Islamic cultural heritage of Bangladesh in the name of a secular Bengali identity that is actually the cultural identity of a specific educated urban elite. And he rejects the Islamist answer because it reduces the profound and philosophically sophisticated spiritual tradition of Islam to a set of legal prescriptions and political demands, and because it serves, in practice, as a mechanism for the exercise of religious authority over a diverse and complex society in ways that are deeply incompatible with genuine human dignity and freedom.

The alternative that Mazhar has been developing over the course of his intellectual career is not a compromise or a middle position between these two poles. It is a genuinely different framework, grounded in a different understanding of what religion is, what politics is, and what the relationship between them should be. This framework draws on Islamic philosophical traditions, on the Sufi tradition and its Bengali expression in the Baul and Fakiri movements, on Marxist political economy, on Foucauldian analysis of power and subjectivity, and on the specific historical experience of the Bengali Muslim people. The result is an intellectual project that is, in the most precise sense of the word, synthetic: not an eclectic combination of disparate elements but a genuinely unified philosophical vision achieved through the sustained and rigorous engagement with multiple intellectual traditions.

Part Four of this textbook examines this synthetic vision in its full depth and complexity. It begins with the historical and philosophical context of Islam in Bengal, tracing the specific character of the Islamic tradition as it developed in the Bengal delta and the relationship between

that tradition and the political history of Muslim Bengal. It examines Mazhar's engagement with classical Islamic philosophy and jurisprudence, including his reading of figures like Ibn Arabi, Al-Ghazali, and the tradition of Islamic political thought from Al-Farabi to the contemporary debates in Islamic political philosophy. It analyzes his synthesis of Islamic spiritual philosophy and radical political thought in the concept of roohaniath, situating that concept in relation to both the Islamic philosophical tradition and the contemporary debates in political philosophy about the relationship between religion and politics. It examines the specific controversies generated by his Islamic writings, including Ebadatnama and his commentaries on the Quran, in the context of both the secular nationalist critique and the Islamist critique of his work. And it assesses the significance of his Islamic political philosophy for the constitutional debates that have been underway in Bangladesh since the 2024 uprising and for the broader global debates about Islam, democracy, and political modernity.

CHAPTER ONE: ISLAM IN THE BENGAL DELTA: A PHILOSOPHICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Islam that came to the Bengal delta was not the same Islam that existed in the Arabian Peninsula in the seventh century, and it was not the same Islam that developed in the great urban centers of the Islamic world, in Baghdad, Cairo, Cordoba, and Samarkand. It was an Islam transformed by its encounter with the specific ecological, cultural, and spiritual conditions of the delta: shaped by the Sufi missionaries who brought it to Bengal, by the indigenous traditions of the region that it encountered and with which it entered into complex relationships of influence and synthesis, and by the specific social and political conditions of a region that was simultaneously at the periphery of several great empires and at the center of one of the most productive and culturally rich agricultural civilizations in the world.

This historical specificity of Bengali Islam is the foundational context for understanding Farhad Mazhar's engagement with Islamic thought. When Mazhar speaks of Islam, he does not speak of an abstract theological or legal system that exists independently of the historical and cultural conditions in which it has been practiced. He speaks of a living tradition, embedded in the specific landscape and the specific social relationships of the Bengal delta, expressing itself through specific cultural forms, specific musical traditions, specific practices of the body and of the spirit, that cannot be understood apart from that embedding. This insistence on the contextual specificity of Islamic practice and Islamic thought is itself a philosophical position, a position about the relationship between universal religious truth and its particular historical expressions, and it is one of the most important and most controversial dimensions of Mazhar's Islamic thinking.

The Islamization of Bengal began, according to the mainstream historical account, with the military conquest of the region by Bakhtiyar Khilji in 1203 and proceeded over the following centuries through a combination of political pressure, economic incentive, and the missionary activity of Sufi orders, most importantly the Chishti order associated with figures like Shah Jalal of Sylhet and the various orders that were active in different parts of the delta. The historical reality of this process was, of course, far more complex and contested than any simple narrative

of conquest and conversion suggests, and the scholarly literature on the Islamization of Bengal has produced a rich and contentious debate about the motivations for conversion, the nature of the Islam that was adopted, and the relationship between the new faith and the indigenous religious traditions that it encountered.

Richard Eaton's influential study *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, published in 1993 and still the most important scholarly account of the historical Islamization of Bengal, argued that the primary mechanism of conversion was not political coercion but the association of Islam with the expansion of agricultural settlement into the forested areas of the eastern delta, where Sufi pirs served as pioneers of agricultural civilization and where adoption of Islam was associated with access to the resources and the protection of the newly forming agricultural communities. This argument, whatever its specific empirical merits, points to something important about the character of Bengali Islam: its rootedness in the agricultural communities of the delta, its association with specific forms of ecological relationship and specific practices of the land, and its connection to the spiritual leadership of the pir, the Sufi master, whose authority was grounded not in legal scholarship but in spiritual attainment and in the capacity to mediate between the human community and the divine.

Mazhar's engagement with this history is not primarily an exercise in historical scholarship. It is a philosophical engagement with the question of what kind of Islamic tradition has developed in Bengal and what philosophical resources that tradition contains for thinking about the conditions of human flourishing and political justice in the present. His answer, developed through his poetry, his philosophical essays, and his engagement with the Lalon tradition, is that the Islamic tradition as it developed in the Bengal delta contains a distinctive philosophical orientation that is, in important respects, different from and philosophically richer than the Islam that is currently claiming political authority in Bangladesh and elsewhere.

This distinctive orientation is characterized by several features that Mazhar identifies and analyzes. First, it is characterized by a strong emphasis on the inner, experiential dimension of religious life, on the relationship between the individual soul and the divine that is cultivated through spiritual practice rather than through legal observance. This emphasis, which is the characteristic emphasis of the Sufi tradition that was primarily responsible for the Islamization of Bengal, places the cultivation of the inner life at the center of religious practice and treats external legal observance as secondary to or instrumental in relation to this inner cultivation. Second, Bengali Islam as it developed in the delta tradition is characterized by a strong egalitarian impulse, a rejection of the hierarchies of birth and caste that characterized both the Hindu social order and the elitist tendencies of the urban scholarly class, in favor of a vision of spiritual equality that made the grace of the divine available to all human beings regardless of their social position.

Third, and most relevant to Mazhar's philosophical project, the Bengali Islamic tradition as expressed in the Baul and Fakiri movements developed a specific understanding of the relationship between the divine and the human that is philosophically sophisticated and that has important implications for both political philosophy and for the understanding of human subjectivity. The tradition of the Moner Manush, the Man of the Heart or the inner human, that runs through Lalon Shah's songs and through the broader tradition of Baul philosophy, expresses

a vision of the relationship between the human being and the divine that is neither the theistic transcendence of orthodox Islamic theology nor the pantheistic immanence that orthodox scholars have accused the Bauls and Fakirs of embracing. It is a vision of the divine as the innermost ground of the human self, accessible through a specific practice of self-cultivation and inner attention that transforms the ordinary ego-bound consciousness into the awareness of the Moner Manush who is both fully human and fully in relationship with the divine ground.

This philosophical tradition, which Mazhar has spent his intellectual career engaging with and elaborating, provides the foundation for his understanding of roohaniath, spirituality, which is the key concept through which he attempts to bridge the gap between Islamic spiritual philosophy and radical political thought.

CHAPTER TWO: ROOHANIATH: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANATOMY OF MAZHAR'S CENTRAL CONCEPT

The concept of roohaniath, which translates literally as spirituality from the Arabic ruh, spirit or soul, but which in Mazhar's philosophical usage carries a much more complex and technically specific meaning, is the pivotal concept through which his entire synthesis of Islamic spiritual philosophy, Marxist political analysis, and Bengali cultural thought is organized. Understanding this concept in its full philosophical depth is essential for understanding the coherence and the significance of his intellectual project, and it is worth devoting sustained attention to its philosophical anatomy before proceeding to examine its applications in specific areas of his thought.

The root word ruh in Arabic is one of the most philosophically contested terms in the Islamic intellectual tradition. The Quran itself acknowledges the mystery of the ruh in Sura Al-Isra, verse 85, where God responds to the question about the nature of the spirit by saying: "The ruh is from the command of my Lord, and you have not been given of knowledge except a little." This Quranic acknowledgment of the essential mystery of the spirit has generated an enormous tradition of philosophical and theological reflection in Islamic thought, from the early discussions in the Mutakallimun tradition to the sophisticated metaphysics of Ibn Arabi's Fusus al-Hikam and the various Sufi philosophical traditions that developed in its wake.

Mazhar's engagement with the concept of ruh is grounded in this tradition but is not identical with any single strand within it. He draws most extensively on the tradition of Islamic mystical philosophy, particularly on the thought of Ibn Arabi, the thirteenth-century Andalusian philosopher and mystic whose system of Wahdat al-Wujud, the Unity of Being, has been one of the most influential and most controversial frameworks in the entire history of Islamic thought. Ibn Arabi's philosophical system, which holds that all existing things are manifestations of a single divine being in different modes of self-disclosure, provides Mazhar with a philosophical framework for thinking about the relationship between the divine and the human that avoids both the strict transcendence of orthodox Ashari theology, which places an unbridgeable gulf between the divine and the created, and the simple immanence of certain pantheistic traditions, which collapse the distinction between the divine and the world.

The relevance of Ibn Arabi's philosophical framework to Mazhar's political thought is not immediately obvious, but it is real and important. The Wahdatan al-Wujud framework, by understanding all existing things as modes of divine self-disclosure, generates a specific understanding of the value of each existing thing: each thing, insofar as it exists, participates in the being of the divine, and is therefore worthy of a form of respect and care that the conventional ontological frameworks, which treat the divine as entirely separate from the created world, cannot generate. This understanding of the value of existing things connects, in Mazhar's synthesis, with the ecological philosophy examined in Part Three: the understanding that the natural world is not merely a resource to be exploited but a form of divine self-disclosure to be engaged with in a spirit of attentive care and gratitude.

But the connection between Ibn Arabi's metaphysics and Mazhar's political philosophy goes deeper than this ecological application. The Wahdatan al-Wujud framework also generates a specific understanding of human subjectivity and of the relationship between individual consciousness and the ground of being that has important implications for political philosophy. In Ibn Arabi's framework, the individual human consciousness is not a self-contained and self-sufficient subject, an autonomous rational agent confronting a world of objects, but a mode of divine self-consciousness, a specific form in which the divine being becomes aware of itself through the medium of individual human existence. This understanding of the human being as a mode of divine self-awareness rather than as a self-sufficient autonomous agent is, in Mazhar's analysis, more consistent with the actual conditions of human existence, with the fundamental dependency of human beings on each other and on the natural world, than the atomistic individual of liberal political philosophy.

The concept of roohaniath in Mazhar's usage refers not to the individual's spiritual experience in the narrow sense, to the private relationship between an individual soul and the divine, but to the spiritual dimension of collective human existence: the dimension of human life and human community that is organized around the cultivation of the inner life, around the development of the forms of awareness, sensitivity, and attentiveness that allow human beings to engage fully with each other and with the world. Roohaniath, in this sense, is the antithesis of what Mazhar calls the instrumental relationship, the mode of engagement with the world and with other human beings that is characteristic of capitalist modernity and that treats everything, including other human beings and the natural world, as means to the satisfaction of individual desires rather than as ends in themselves.

The philosophical genealogy of this concept of roohaniath includes, in addition to Ibn Arabi, the tradition of the Sufi masters of Bengal, particularly the tradition of the pir whose authority was grounded in spiritual attainment rather than in formal religious learning. The pir's relationship with his disciples, in the Sufi tradition, was not primarily a relationship of doctrinal instruction or legal guidance but a relationship of spiritual transformation, a relationship in which the disciple's inner life was gradually transformed through the influence of the pir's spiritual presence and through the practices and disciplines that the pir transmitted. This model of spiritual transformation through relationship is, in Mazhar's philosophical framework, a model of the political relationship at its best: a relationship in which human beings are transformed not through coercion or manipulation but through the cultivation of genuine forms of awareness and solidarity.

The connection between the Sufi tradition's model of spiritual transformation and Mazhar's political philosophy is made explicit in his treatment of the concept of fana, the mystical annihilation of the ego-self that is one of the central concepts in the Sufi understanding of the spiritual path. Fana does not mean, in the Sufi tradition, the literal destruction of the individual self; it means the dissolution of the ego's characteristic mode of engagement with the world, the mode characterized by grasping, possessiveness, and the anxious effort to maintain and expand the boundaries of the individual self at the expense of others and of the natural world. The state that follows fana, called baqa or subsistence, is a state in which the individual continues to exist and to act in the world but does so from a radically different orientation: from the orientation of the Moner Manush who acts from the fullness of the divine presence rather than from the neediness of the ego.

Mazhar's political appropriation of this concept involves the claim that the transformation of political life requires something analogous to the spiritual transformation that the Sufi tradition calls fana: a dissolution of the ego-bound mode of political engagement that characterizes existing political institutions and political actors, a mode characterized by the pursuit of power, the accumulation of privilege, and the instrumentalization of others, and its replacement by a mode of political engagement grounded in the kind of attentive care, genuine solidarity, and commitment to the common good that the Sufi tradition associates with the state of baqa. This is not a call for politicians to become mystics; it is a philosophical claim about what genuine political community requires, a claim that genuine political community cannot be built on the foundations of the atomistic individual pursuing their rational self-interest but requires a transformation of the mode of being from which political actors engage with each other and with the common good.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ENCOUNTER WITH CLASSICAL ISLAMIC JURISPRUDENCE AND ITS CRITIQUE

Mazhar's engagement with Islam extends beyond the mystical and philosophical traditions to encompass a serious engagement with the tradition of Islamic jurisprudence, fiqh, and the broader tradition of Islamic political thought that has developed around the question of how an Islamic community should be governed. This engagement is critical: Mazhar does not accept the classical tradition of Islamic jurisprudence as a model for contemporary governance, and his critique of that tradition is as sharp and as philosophically grounded as his critique of the Western liberal tradition. But his critique is not the dismissal of the tradition; it is an engagement with it that takes it seriously enough to argue with it on its own terms.

The classical tradition of Islamic jurisprudence, which developed over the first four centuries of Islamic history and which reached its mature form in the major law schools, the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafii, and Hanbali madhhabs among the Sunni schools and the Jafari school among the Shia, was an extraordinary intellectual achievement. It developed, through the application of specific methods of legal reasoning to the primary sources of the Quran and the Sunnah, an elaborate and comprehensive system of legal norms covering almost every dimension of human existence, from the rituals of worship to the rules of commercial transactions, from the principles of family

law to the conduct of war and the treatment of non-Muslim minorities. This system of legal norms was understood by its architects not as a human construction but as the expression of the divine will as it had been revealed to the Prophet Muhammad and as it could be accessed, through the application of proper methods of legal reasoning, from the sources that the revelation had generated.

Mazhar's critique of this tradition begins with what he identifies as its foundational epistemological assumption: the assumption that the divine will can be expressed in the form of specific legal rules that are binding on all human beings in all historical contexts. This assumption, he argues, involves a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of divine revelation and of the relationship between the divine will and the human conditions in which it must be expressed. The revelation, in Mazhar's philosophical understanding, is not a set of specific legal rules but a fundamental orientation, a direction of human life toward the divine ground of existence that must be expressed differently in different historical conditions. The classical jurisprudential tradition's attempt to extract specific and universally binding legal rules from the revelation is, in this analysis, a form of idolatry of the letter that kills the spirit, a reduction of the living relationship between the divine and the human to a set of fixed and unchangeable prescriptions.

This critique is not original to Mazhar; it is shared by a wide range of contemporary Islamic reformers and by many classical Islamic thinkers who argued for the context-sensitivity of Islamic legal reasoning. The tradition of *ijtihad*, independent legal reasoning, was specifically designed to allow for the adaptation of Islamic law to changing historical conditions, and the classical jurisprudential tradition itself recognized that legal rulings could change when the conditions that had generated them changed. The famous Shafi'i school's rule that legal rulings change with the change in times, places, persons, and conditions, *al-ahkam tataghayyar bi taghayyur al-azminat wa al-amkina wa al-ahwal wa al-niyyat wa al-awaed*, was a recognition within the tradition itself of the need for contextual sensitivity in the application of legal principles.

What distinguishes Mazhar's critique from this internal tradition of juridical adaptation is its philosophical depth and its political radicalism. Mazhar is not arguing merely that specific legal rulings need to be adapted to contemporary conditions, while the fundamental methodology of classical jurisprudence remains valid. He is arguing that the entire framework of classical jurisprudence, its understanding of the nature of revelation, its relationship to political authority, and its conception of the proper relationship between religion and the governance of human community, needs to be reconceived in the light of both the philosophical resources of the Sufi tradition and the political insights of the radical tradition of political thought.

The specific dimension of classical Islamic jurisprudence that Mazhar subjects to the most sustained critique is the tradition of Islamic political thought associated with the concept of the caliphate and the doctrine of the political sovereignty of God, *al-hakimiyya lillah*, that has become, in the modern period, the foundational claim of political Islam. The doctrine of divine sovereignty, which holds that legitimate political authority can only derive from the divine will as expressed in the sharia, and that any political system not grounded in the sharia is therefore illegitimate, has been the central claim of political Islamist movements from Mawdudi's Jamaat-

e-Islami to the Muslim Brotherhood to the Islamic State. It represents, in Mazhar's analysis, a fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship between the divine sovereignty that Islamic theology affirms and the political sovereignty that human communities must exercise in the governance of their affairs.

The philosophical argument that Mazhar develops against the doctrine of al-hakimiyya is complex and multi-dimensional. At its core, it rests on a distinction between two different kinds of sovereignty: the metaphysical sovereignty of the divine, which consists in the fact that all existence depends on the divine ground of being and that all human agency ultimately operates within and through the divine creative power, and the political sovereignty of human communities, which consists in the capacity of those communities to be the genuine authors of the political arrangements under which they live. These two kinds of sovereignty, he argues, are not competing claims that must be resolved in favor of one or the other; they exist at different levels of reality and they do not conflict.

The political Islamist doctrine of al-hakimiyya confuses these two levels of sovereignty. It takes the theological claim about the divine sovereignty, the claim that all existence depends on the divine and that all genuine authority ultimately derives from the divine will, and translates it into a political claim about the institutional forms through which human communities must be governed: the claim that political institutions can only be legitimate if they derive their authority from the sharia as interpreted by religious scholars. This translation is, in Mazhar's analysis, both philosophically invalid and politically dangerous: philosophically invalid because it conflates two different kinds of sovereignty that exist at different levels, and politically dangerous because it provides the theoretical foundation for theocratic claims to political authority that are fundamentally incompatible with the equal dignity and equal political agency of all human beings.

The Islamic tradition that Mazhar draws on as an alternative to the political Islamist appropriation of the concept of divine sovereignty is the Sufi tradition's understanding of the relationship between the divine and the human, particularly the understanding developed in the tradition of the Perfect Human Being, al-insan al-kamil, that Ibn Arabi and subsequent Sufi philosophers developed. The Perfect Human Being, in this tradition, is not the ideal ruler who implements the divine law through political authority; it is the spiritually perfected human being who, through the process of inner transformation and spiritual cultivation, has become a transparent medium for the divine creative power in the world. The political model that this tradition implies is not a theocracy in which religious scholars implement divine law through political coercion but a community of spiritually cultivated human beings engaged in the cooperative management of their common life according to the principles of care, justice, and mutual obligation that the spiritual tradition teaches.

CHAPTER FOUR: EBADATNAMA AND ITS CONTROVERSIES: CLOSE READING

Ebadatnama, Mazhar's major collection of Islamic poetry, is the literary work that has generated more controversy and more misunderstanding than any other in his oeuvre, and it deserves

sustained close attention as the primary textual site at which his synthesis of Islamic spiritual philosophy and radical political thought is expressed in its most concentrated and most artistically powerful form. The title itself is significant: *Ebadatnama*, literally the Book of Worship or the Record of Devotion, places the collection explicitly within the tradition of Islamic devotional literature while signaling, through the very choice of the Bengali word *ebadatnama* rather than the Arabic *ibadah* or the Persian form, that the devotion being explored is not the devotion of formal religious observance but something more personal, more immediate, and more philosophically challenging.

The first controversy generated by *Ebadatnama* is the controversy about its relationship to orthodox Islamic practice. The collection's engagement with the divine is irreverent in the deepest theological sense: it refuses to maintain the respectful distance between the worshipper and the worshipped that orthodox Islamic devotional practice typically enforces, and it insists instead on an intimacy, a directness, and a frankness of address that many orthodox readers have found offensive or even blasphemous. Mazhar addresses God not as the transcendent sovereign demanding submission and obedience but as a presence that is intimate and immediate, a presence that can be questioned, challenged, and even argued with. This mode of address has its precedents in the tradition of Islamic poetry, particularly in the tradition of the *ghazal* and in the mystical poetry of figures like Rumi, Hafez, and Attar, but Mazhar's version is more philosophically explicit and more politically charged than any of these precedents.

The theological tradition that justifies this intimate and challenging mode of address to the divine is the Sufi tradition of *maqamat wa ahwal*, the stations and states of the spiritual path, in which the spiritual seeker's relationship with the divine is understood to pass through various stages of development, from the initial stages of fear and hope, through the stages of love and longing, to the final stages of intimacy and annihilation in which the conventional distance between the worshipper and the worshipped is dissolved. In the later stages of the Sufi path, the relationship between the mystic and the divine is understood to be so intimate that the conventional modes of address, with their formal respect for the transcendent sovereignty of the divine, are no longer appropriate; the relationship has become one of loving intimacy that generates a different, more direct, and more challenging mode of engagement.

Mazhar situates his poetic voice in this tradition, but with a crucial difference: his intimacy with the divine is not the intimacy of the mystical ecstatic who has achieved a private spiritual realization separate from the political world. It is the intimacy of a thinker who is bringing the divine presence into the most contested and most urgent political questions of his time, who is refusing the separation between the spiritual and the political that both secular nationalism and political Islam enforce in different ways. The God addressed in *Ebadatnama* is not a God who can be appeased by formal observance or by the implementation of legal prescriptions; God is a God who is present in the struggles of the poor, in the exploitation of the farmer, in the violence of the state, and who demands a response to these conditions that goes beyond formal religious observance to the transformation of the conditions themselves.

This theological position, which is the position of what contemporary Islamic scholars have called political theology, has a distinguished tradition in Islamic intellectual history. The great Iranian philosopher Ali Shariati, whose thought was one of the intellectual foundations of the

Iranian Revolution, argued for an Islam that was fundamentally this-worldly in its concerns, an Islam that understood the liberation of the oppressed as a religious obligation rather than a merely political or economic goal. The Egyptian intellectual Sayyid Qutb, in his early, non-violent phase, argued for a reading of the Quran that made social justice the central concern of Islamic practice. And the tradition of liberation theology in Islam, associated with thinkers working in various contexts across the Muslim world, has consistently argued for an understanding of Islamic practice that makes the transformation of unjust social and political conditions a central religious obligation.

Mazhar's position is both continuous with and critically different from all of these traditions. It is continuous with Shariati's this-worldly political theology, but it avoids the nationalist dimension of Shariati's Iranian-centered vision and the revolutionary vanguardism that has marred many applications of political theology in the Islamic world. It is continuous with the tradition of Islamic liberation theology, but it grounds that theology not in the legal tradition of the sharia but in the mystical tradition of the Sufi orders and the specific philosophical resources of the Bengali Baul and Fakiri tradition. And it is continuous with the tradition of Islamic political thought more broadly, but it refuses the theocratic conclusion that most of that tradition has drawn from the premise of divine sovereignty, insisting instead that the divine sovereignty expressed in the Islamic revelation is more consistent with the genuine political sovereignty of free communities than with any form of religious political authority.

The second controversy generated by Ebadatnama, and the controversy that has been more politically consequential, is the controversy about its relationship to the secular nationalist tradition in Bangladesh. As noted in Part Two, the secular nationalist tradition in Bangladesh has organized its cultural politics around a vision of Bengali identity that is defined primarily in linguistic and cultural terms and that treats religious identity as a potential threat to the unity and the secular character of the Bangladeshi nation. Within this framework, Mazhar's insistence on engaging with Islamic language, Islamic concepts, and the Islamic spiritual tradition as resources for political philosophy is inevitably read as a form of Islamism: as an attempt to introduce religious criteria into the political sphere in ways that are incompatible with the secular principles of the Bangladeshi state.

This reading fundamentally misunderstands what Mazhar is doing, but the misunderstanding is not surprising given the political context in which it occurs. The secular nationalist tradition has good historical reasons for being suspicious of the political use of Islamic identity in Bangladesh: the memory of Pakistani nationalism, which used Islamic identity as the basis for denying the legitimate political aspirations of the Bengali people, and the more recent memory of the period between 1975 and 1990, when the military governments of Zia and Ershad used the promotion of Islamic identity as a tool for undermining the secular nationalist tradition and consolidating authoritarian political power, are vivid and important political memories that make any engagement with Islamic thought in the political domain look like a repetition of these dangerous precedents.

Mazhar's response to this misreading is not to reassure the secular nationalists that his Islamic poetry is really just aesthetics and has no political implications; that would be dishonest. It is to challenge the assumption that any engagement with Islamic thought in the political domain must

be Islamist, arguing that this assumption is itself a form of epistemological closure that prevents the development of a genuinely adequate political philosophy for a country whose majority population is Muslim and whose culture is deeply shaped by Islamic spiritual traditions. A political philosophy that can only engage with the cultural heritage of a small secular urban elite and that must treat the Islamic spiritual heritage of the vast majority of the population as either irrelevant or dangerous is not adequate for governing Bangladesh in any genuinely democratic sense.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION IN A POSTCOLONIAL KEY: MAZHAR IN DIALOGUE WITH GLOBAL TRADITIONS

The concept of liberation theology, originally developed in the Latin American Catholic context by thinkers like Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, and Jon Sobrino, is one of the most important comparative frameworks for understanding Mazhar's synthesis of Islamic spiritual philosophy and radical political thought. Liberation theology, broadly defined, holds that religious thought and practice must be oriented by a preferential option for the poor, a fundamental commitment to the liberation of the oppressed from the conditions of poverty, exploitation, and political exclusion that characterize their existence. This commitment is not, for the liberation theologians, a merely political or ethical commitment that happens to be associated with religious language; it is a theological commitment grounded in a reading of the religious tradition that places the liberation of the oppressed at the center of the divine will and the religious vocation.

The most significant point of convergence between liberation theology and Mazhar's Islamic philosophy is the methodological principle of contextual reading: the principle that the religious tradition must be read from the specific context of the most marginalized and most oppressed members of the community, and that readings of the tradition that serve the interests of the powerful at the expense of the powerless must be subjected to systematic critique. This principle, which is the methodological heart of liberation theology, is also central to Mazhar's approach to the Islamic tradition. His reading of the Quran, of the Sufi tradition, and of the Lalon corpus is consistently a reading from the margins, a reading that asks what these texts and traditions have to say to the farmers, the agricultural laborers, the women, and the urban poor who constitute the majority of the Bangladeshi population and who have been systematically excluded from the cultural and political frameworks through which the tradition has been officially interpreted.

The comparison with the African American tradition of liberation theology, associated with figures like James Cone, is also illuminating. Cone's black theology, which argues for a reading of the Christian tradition from the specific experience of racial oppression and the struggle for liberation, shares with Mazhar's Islamic philosophy the insistence on the political urgency of theological reflection and the critique of religious traditions that have been used to legitimate racial or class oppression. Cone's distinction between the whitened Christianity of the slaveholders, which preached submission to God's will as a justification for the submission of enslaved people to their oppressors, and the black Christianity of the enslaved, which drew on the same texts to articulate a vision of liberation and divine judgment on the oppressor, is a

distinction that has direct analogues in Mazhar's critique of the Islam of the religious establishment and his recovery of the Islam of the Sufi tradition and the Baul and Fakiri movements.

The Indian tradition of Dalit Buddhism, associated with B.R. Ambedkar's rejection of Hinduism and conversion to Buddhism as a form of radical political and spiritual liberation, is another important comparative reference point. Ambedkar's argument that the Hindu caste system could not be reformed from within, that genuine liberation from the dehumanizing effects of caste required a radical break with the religious tradition that had sanctified that system, is a position that raises questions directly relevant to Mazhar's engagement with the Islamic tradition. Should the Islamic tradition be reformed from within, working to recover the egalitarian and liberatory dimensions of the tradition against the hierarchical and authoritarian interpretations that have dominated its public expression? Or does the association of Islamic orthodoxy with political repression and social hierarchy suggest that genuine liberation requires a more fundamental break with the tradition?

Mazhar's answer to this question is firmly in favor of internal reform rather than radical break. His argument is that the authoritarian and hierarchical interpretations of Islam that have been politically dominant are not the authentic expression of the Islamic tradition but perversions of it, distortions produced by the association of religious authority with political power and by the appropriation of the tradition by specific class interests. The authentic Islam, the Islam of the Sufi tradition, of the Baul and Fakiri movements, of the Quran read from the perspective of the oppressed, is a tradition that is fundamentally egalitarian, fundamentally committed to the dignity and the freedom of every human being, and fundamentally opposed to all forms of hierarchy and domination. The task of Islamic political philosophy, in Mazhar's vision, is not to abandon this tradition but to recover its authentic liberatory content from beneath the accumulations of authoritarian and hierarchical interpretation that have obscured it.

This position is not without its philosophical difficulties. The question of which interpretation of a tradition is the authentic one and which is a distortion is one that cannot be resolved by appeal to the tradition itself, because the competing interpretations each claim to be authentic and each can marshal textual and historical evidence in support of their claim. Mazhar is aware of this difficulty, and his response to it is not to claim a privileged hermeneutical access to the authentic meaning of the Islamic tradition but to argue that the interpretive criterion should be political and ethical rather than purely textual or historical: the reading of the tradition that is most consistent with the liberation and the genuine flourishing of all human beings, and particularly of the most marginalized and most oppressed, is the most adequate reading, regardless of its specific textual and historical credentials.

This is an argument with deep roots in the philosophy of interpretation, hermeneutics, and it has important implications for the relationship between Islamic jurisprudence, as a tradition of textual interpretation, and Islamic political philosophy, as a tradition of thinking about justice and political community. Mazhar's position implicitly invokes Hans-Georg Gadamer's concept of the fusion of horizons, the understanding that genuine interpretation involves a dialogue between the interpreter's own historical and cultural horizon and the horizon expressed in the text, and Paul Ricoeur's concept of the world of the text, the understanding that the meaning of a text is

not simply what the original author intended but what the text opens up as a possibility of understanding for the reader engaged with it in their specific historical situation.

Applied to the Islamic tradition, this hermeneutical framework supports the claim that the meaning of the Quran is not fixed by the historical context of its revelation or by the interpretations of the earliest generations of Muslims, the salaf, but is a living and developing meaning that is constituted through the ongoing engagement of Muslim communities with the text in their specific historical and cultural situations. This is, of course, precisely the claim that orthodox Salafi and Wahabi interpretations of the tradition reject: those interpretations insist that the meaning of the Quran and the Sunnah is fixed by the practice of the first three generations of Muslims and that any departure from that practice is a blameworthy innovation, *bid'ah*. Mazhar's hermeneutical position is therefore not merely a philosophical refinement of Islamic interpretive theory; it is a direct challenge to the epistemological foundations of the most politically powerful contemporary forms of Islamic conservatism.

CHAPTER SIX: THE CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL ISLAM AND THE THEORY OF RELIGION IN POLITICS

One of the most significant and most politically contentious dimensions of Mazhar's engagement with Islam is his sustained critique of political Islam as it has manifested in Bangladesh and in the broader Muslim world. This critique is important not only for what it says about specific Islamist movements and parties but for what it reveals about Mazhar's deeper understanding of the proper relationship between religion and political life and about the conditions under which religious values can and cannot legitimately enter the political sphere.

The specific object of Mazhar's most sustained critique in the Bangladeshi context is Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, the political party founded by Mawdudi's disciples after partition and notorious for its collaboration with the Pakistani military in the atrocities of the Liberation War of 1971. Jamaat's role in 1971, which included the formation of paramilitary organizations like the Al-Badr and Al-Shams who were directly involved in the killing of Bengali intellectuals and the perpetration of other atrocities against the Bengali civilian population, has made it one of the most reviled political organizations in Bangladesh, and the trials of its leaders at the International Crimes Tribunal established in 2010 have brought renewed public attention to its wartime conduct.

But Mazhar's critique of Jamaat is not primarily a critique of its wartime conduct, however important and well-founded that critique is. It is a critique of its foundational political philosophy: of the understanding of Islam and politics that leads, in his analysis, inevitably to the kind of authoritarian and violent politics that Jamaat has practiced throughout its history. The foundational claim of Jamaat's political philosophy, following Mawdudi, is that Islam is a complete system of life, *din*, that encompasses all dimensions of human existence and that therefore requires the establishment of an Islamic state in which all political, legal, and social arrangements conform to the principles of the sharia as interpreted by the Islamic scholarly class. This claim, Mazhar argues, is both theologically mistaken and politically dangerous.

The theological mistake lies in the identification of the divine will with a specific set of political arrangements and legal rules that can be implemented through the coercive apparatus of the state. This identification, Mazhar argues, is a form of shirk, the Islamic concept of the association of the divine with something other than the divine: in this case, the association of the infinite and transcendent divine will with the finite and historically conditioned interpretations of specific human scholars and political actors. The divine will, in Mazhar's understanding, cannot be captured in any specific political or legal system; it is always more, always beyond, always calling into question the adequacy of any specific human arrangement in its name. A political party that claims to represent the divine will through its specific program and its specific legal agenda is not expressing genuine Islamic piety; it is committing the theological error of reducing the divine to the human.

The political danger of the Islamist project is equally clear in Mazhar's analysis. The claim to implement the divine will through political power generates an inherently authoritarian logic: if the state is the instrument of the divine will, then opposition to the state's policies becomes not merely political opposition but theological deviance, not merely legitimate disagreement within the framework of democratic politics but a challenge to the divine sovereignty that the Islamic state is supposed to express. This logic, which is explicit in Mawdudi's political philosophy and implicit in the practice of Islamist political movements throughout the Muslim world, is fundamentally incompatible with the genuine political sovereignty of free communities and with the conditions of democratic governance.

The distinction that Mazhar insists on, and that is central to his alternative understanding of the relationship between religion and politics, is the distinction between the values and the orientations that the Islamic tradition cultivates in the people who live within it and the specific political arrangements and legal rules through which those values and orientations might be expressed in particular historical conditions. The Islamic tradition, in Mazhar's reading, cultivates specific values: justice, compassion, solidarity with the vulnerable, accountability of the powerful, the equal dignity of all human beings. These values are not uniquely Islamic; they are shared by many religious and philosophical traditions. But the specific forms through which they are cultivated and the specific cultural resources through which they are expressed are distinctively shaped by the Islamic tradition and by the specific forms that tradition has taken in the Bengal delta.

These values are politically relevant: they generate specific orientations in political life, specific commitments to specific ways of organizing political community and specific criteria for evaluating political institutions. But they do not generate a specific blueprint for political organization that can be simply read off from the religious texts and implemented through political power. The translation of these values into specific political and legal arrangements is a political task, a task that must be performed by the members of the community in their specific historical situation, through processes of collective deliberation and negotiation that are genuinely open and genuinely democratic. Any attempt to shortcut this process by claiming that the divine will has already determined the correct political arrangements, and that the role of the political community is simply to implement those arrangements, is a theological error and a political danger.

This analysis has direct implications for the debate about the proper relationship between the sharia and the constitutional framework of Bangladesh. The demand of Islamist political forces that the sharia be made the basis of the constitution, or that the constitution include provisions specifying that no law can be enacted that is repugnant to the Quran and Sunnah, is, in Mazhar's analysis, simultaneously theologically mistaken and politically counterproductive. It is theologically mistaken because it assumes that the content of the sharia is fixed and determinable in ways that the history of Islamic jurisprudence decisively refutes: the four major Sunni law schools differ significantly on major questions of law and governance, and the history of the tradition is a history of ongoing debate and disagreement about what the divine will requires in specific circumstances. It is politically counterproductive because it places questions that should be decided through democratic deliberation, questions about the organization of political and social life, beyond the reach of democratic contestation, handing them over to a class of religious scholars whose interpretive authority is not accountable to the democratic will of the community.

Mazhar's position on the sharia in contemporary Bangladesh is therefore neither the secular nationalist rejection of any Islamic influence on public life nor the Islamist demand for the constitutional establishment of the sharia. It is a position that affirms the relevance of the values and orientations cultivated by the Islamic tradition for the political life of Bangladesh while insisting that the translation of those values into specific political and legal arrangements must be the work of democratic deliberation rather than of religious authority. This is, in effect, the position of what political philosophers have called public reason liberalism translated into an Islamic key: the position that in a pluralistic democratic society, political decisions must be justified by reasons that are accessible to all members of the community, not only to those who share a specific religious tradition, while acknowledging that the moral and spiritual resources of religious traditions may inform the values and orientations that citizens bring to political deliberation.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE EBADATNAMA CONTROVERSY IN DETAIL: CHARGES, RESPONSES, AND JURISPRUDENTIAL ANALYSIS

The controversy surrounding Ebadatnama deserves examination in its specific jurisprudential and legal dimensions, as well as in its literary and philosophical dimensions, because the charges that have been made against the collection, and the responses that Mazhar and his supporters have offered to those charges, illuminate the specific forms that the tension between creative religious thought and religious authority takes in the Bangladeshi legal and social context.

The charges made against Ebadatnama by its Islamist critics have fallen into several overlapping categories. The most serious category is the charge of blasphemy, irtidād or tawhīn, which alleges that specific passages in the collection are offensive to God or to the Prophet Muhammad and therefore constitute criminal offenses under the Islamic legal tradition and, in the view of some critics, under the secular criminal law of Bangladesh as well. The specific passages that have attracted the most criticism are those in which Mazhar addresses God in terms that his critics regard as presumptuous and disrespectful: passages in which the poet expresses frustration with the divine, challenges the divine to account for the suffering of the poor, or uses imagery

derived from human intimacy to describe the relationship between the worshipper and the worshipped.

From the perspective of classical Islamic jurisprudence, the assessment of these charges requires careful analysis of the specific content of the passages in question and of the jurisprudential tradition's understanding of what constitutes blasphemy. The classical tradition of Islamic jurisprudence recognized a category of statements and actions that are considered offensive to the divine majesty and honor, and it prescribed severe penalties for those who intentionally made such statements or performed such actions. But the tradition also recognized that the category of blasphemy must be carefully circumscribed to avoid the suppression of genuine theological and spiritual inquiry, and the major jurisprudential schools developed different and in some cases quite permissive standards for what constituted genuine blasphemy as opposed to merely controversial or unorthodox theological expression.

The Hanafi school, which is the dominant school in the South Asian Muslim tradition including Bangladesh, developed a tradition of relatively careful and context-sensitive jurisprudential analysis of blasphemy charges that required evidence of deliberate and intentional insult to the divine before the charge could be sustained. The expression of theological doubt, of spiritual struggle, of the full range of human emotions in the context of the relationship with the divine, was not in itself considered blasphemous by the Hanafi tradition, as long as it was clear that the speaker was genuinely engaged with the divine rather than deliberately seeking to insult or mock it. This jurisprudential analysis provides support for the claim that Mazhar's poetry, which is clearly an expression of genuine and passionate engagement with the divine rather than mockery or deliberate insult, does not meet the threshold for blasphemy even on the classical jurisprudential analysis.

The Fiqh al-Waqii tradition, the tradition of contextual jurisprudence that applies Islamic legal principles to contemporary circumstances, adds another dimension to this analysis. The contemporary Fiqh al-Waqii scholars have argued that the classical blasphemy provisions must be understood in their specific historical context, as responses to specific forms of public insult to the Prophet and the religion that were calculated to undermine the cohesion of the early Muslim community, and that they cannot be mechanically applied to the very different context of contemporary literary and philosophical expression in a pluralistic democratic society. This contextual approach to the blasphemy provisions supports Mazhar's poetry's claim to be a legitimate form of Islamic expression, however controversial, rather than a criminal offense subject to legal sanction.

The broader jurisprudential question raised by the Ebadatnama controversy is the question of the relationship between legal prohibition and intellectual freedom in the Islamic tradition. The Islamic tradition has a complex and nuanced history in this area: it includes traditions of vigorous theological debate and mutual criticism between different schools of thought, as well as traditions of official censorship and persecution of heterodox views. The question of where the boundary lies between legitimate theological diversity and impermissible deviation from the basic principles of the faith has been one of the most contentious questions in Islamic intellectual history, and it has generated different answers in different historical and cultural contexts.

The contemporary Islamic political philosopher Abdulaziz Sachedina, in his major work on Islamic democracy, argues that the tradition of takfir, the declaration that a specific Muslim is an apostate or unbeliever, has been systematically abused throughout Islamic history as a tool of political persecution and that a genuine Islamic political ethics requires a strict limitation on the use of this tool to only the most extreme and unambiguous cases. This argument has direct relevance to the Ebadatnama controversy: the critics who have accused Mazhar of blasphemy or apostasy are effectively making a claim about the limits of legitimate Islamic expression that, if accepted, would drastically curtail the intellectual freedom that the Islamic tradition itself has at other moments celebrated as a condition of genuine understanding.

The response of Mazhar and his supporters to the blasphemy charges has been, characteristically, philosophical rather than merely defensive. Rather than simply denying that his poetry is blasphemous, he has argued that the charges reveal a fundamental misunderstanding of both the nature of poetry and the nature of genuine religious engagement. Poetry, he argues, is not theological treatise; it does not make propositional claims about the nature of the divine that can be evaluated against the standards of orthodox theology. It is an exploration of the human relationship with the divine in all its complexity, doubt, longing, challenge, and surrender, and the suppression of this exploration in the name of doctrinal purity is not a service to genuine religion but a betrayal of it. The genuine religious tradition, including the Islamic tradition, has always known that the most intense religious experiences are those that cannot be expressed in the language of orthodox doctrinal formulation, and the tradition of mystical poetry, from Rumi to Hafez to Lalok, has always pushed against the boundaries of doctrinal respectability in order to give expression to these experiences.

CHAPTER EIGHT: SUFI PHILOSOPHY, WAHDATAN AL-WUJUD, AND THE POLITICS OF UNITY

The Sufi philosophical tradition of Wahdatan al-Wujud, the Unity of Being, which is associated primarily with Ibn Arabi and with the tradition of Islamic mystical philosophy that developed in his wake, occupies a central place in Mazhar's philosophical framework. His engagement with this tradition is not merely an academic exercise in the history of Islamic philosophy; it is a living engagement with a set of ideas that he regards as providing the most adequate philosophical framework available within the Islamic tradition for thinking about the conditions of genuine human flourishing and political justice.

The doctrine of Wahdatan al-Wujud, which holds that all existing things are manifestations of a single divine Being in different modes of self-disclosure, has been one of the most controversial doctrines in the entire history of Islamic thought. Its critics, from the Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya in the fourteenth century to the Salafi scholars of the contemporary period, have argued that it is a form of pantheism incompatible with the fundamental Islamic distinction between the divine Creator and the created world, and that it leads, in practice, to the dissolution of the ethical and legal distinctions between what is halal and what is haram, between what is commanded and what is forbidden, by treating all things as manifestations of the divine and therefore as equally worthy of acceptance.

Mazhar's defense of the Wahdatan al-Wujud tradition against these charges draws on the careful distinctions that Ibn Arabi and his commentators drew between the doctrine of the Unity of Being and the simple pantheism that its critics accused it of implying. The key distinction is the distinction between wujud, existence or being, and the mawjudat, the existent things that participate in being. The doctrine of Wahdatan al-Wujud does not hold that all things are divine in the simple sense of being identical with the divine; it holds that all things participate in the divine existence, draw their being from the divine being, and in this sense manifest the divine in their specific modes of existence. This is a metaphysically subtle position that is compatible with a robust ethical framework distinguishing between more and less adequate modes of human existence and between just and unjust forms of political organization.

The political implications of the Wahdatan al-Wujud framework, as Mazhar develops them, center on the concept of the equal dignity of all existing things as manifestations of the divine. If all human beings are manifestations of the divine in their specific modes of existence, then no human being is more deserving of respect and care than any other on grounds of birth, social position, or religious affiliation. This philosophical foundation supports a politics of radical equality, a politics grounded not in the abstract universalism of Enlightenment political philosophy, which derives human equality from the rational nature that all human beings supposedly share, but in the theological insight of the Sufi tradition, which derives human equality from the equal participation of all human beings in the divine existence.

The connection between this Sufi philosophical foundation and the egalitarian political tradition of the Nadia school that Mazhar analyzed in his reading of the bhav tradition is direct and important. The sixteenth-century revolutionary bhav movement associated with Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, which was the subject of Mazhar's philosophical analysis in an earlier chapter, was itself deeply influenced by the tradition of Islamic Sufism as it had developed in Bengal, and the convergence between the Vaishnava philosophical tradition and the Sufi tradition on questions of spiritual equality and the equal access of all human beings to the divine grace is one of the most significant features of the syncretic religious culture of the Bengal delta. Mazhar's philosophical project, which draws on both of these traditions in developing his understanding of roohaniath and its political implications, is therefore not an arbitrary synthesis of unrelated traditions but an engagement with a genuine historical convergence between the most egalitarian currents within both traditions.

The contemporary relevance of the Wahdatan al-Wujud tradition to the political debates of the twenty-first century has been recognized by a number of Islamic philosophers and political theorists. The Moroccan philosopher Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri, in his major work on the Arab political mind, argued that the hegemony of Gnostic and Hermetic modes of thought in Arab-Islamic intellectual culture, including the tradition of Sufi philosophy, has been one of the factors preventing the development of genuinely democratic political culture in the Arab world. While Al-Jabri's critique of the Sufi tradition is in many respects the mirror image of Mazhar's celebration of it, the debate between them illuminates the stakes of the philosophical question about the relationship between mystical thought and political organization that is central to Mazhar's project.

The Turkish Islamic philosopher Ahmet Davutoglu, whose concept of civilizational depth has become influential in debates about Islam and political modernity, offers a more sympathetic engagement with the tradition of Islamic mystical philosophy, arguing that the Sufi tradition's emphasis on the inner life and on the spiritual transformation of the individual provides important resources for developing an Islamic political philosophy that is genuinely committed to justice and human dignity. While Davutoglu's political positions have been deeply controversial, his philosophical argument about the resources of the Sufi tradition for Islamic political thought converges in important respects with Mazhar's position.

CHAPTER NINE: MAWDUDI, IQBAL, AND THE PATHS NOT TAKEN: COMPARATIVE ISLAMIC POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

The intellectual landscape of Islamic political philosophy in the twentieth century presents a remarkable diversity of responses to the challenge of colonial modernity, ranging from the secular nationalism of the Turkish republican tradition to the radical Islamism of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and the Pakistani Jamaat-e-Islami, from the modernist reformism of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida to the traditionalist conservatism of the Deobandi and Barelvi movements of South Asia. Situating Mazhar's Islamic political philosophy in relation to this diverse landscape is essential for understanding its distinctive character and its significance within the broader project of contemporary Islamic thought.

The figure of Muhammad Iqbal, the great Urdu poet and Islamic philosopher of the early twentieth century whose work is sometimes described as the intellectual foundation of Pakistani nationalism, is a particularly important comparative reference point for Mazhar's Islamic philosophical project. Iqbal's philosophy of *khudi*, the self, which argues for the reconstruction of Islamic thought on the basis of a dynamic, creative, and self-asserting model of human subjectivity, shares with Mazhar's philosophy a commitment to developing an Islamic understanding of human existence that is genuinely adequate to the conditions of modernity while drawing on the resources of the classical Islamic tradition. Both Iqbal and Mazhar are concerned with the question of how the Islamic tradition can generate forms of human subjectivity that are capable of genuine agency, creativity, and political efficacy in the conditions of colonial and postcolonial modernity.

But the differences between Iqbal and Mazhar are as significant as the similarities. Iqbal's philosophy of *khudi*, despite its commitment to the active, self-asserting subject, remains fundamentally oriented toward the divine: the development of the self is understood as a process of approximation to the divine perfection, a process in which the individual human consciousness gradually develops the attributes of the divine through the exercise of creative will. This theocentric orientation generates, in Iqbal's later political thought, a vision of the Islamic state as the political form appropriate to the community of believers committed to the development of divine attributes in human life. Mazhar's relational ontology, derived from the Sufi tradition and the Bengali philosophical heritage, generates a very different political vision: not the strong state guided by divine principles but the community of relationships constituted through solidarity, care, and mutual obligation.

The contrast between Iqbal's dynamic individualism and Mazhar's relational communitarianism is philosophically significant and has important political implications. Iqbal's philosophy, for all its critique of Western liberal individualism, retains a fundamentally individualist structure: the development of the divine attributes in human life is primarily a project of individual self-cultivation, and the political community is secondary to the individual's spiritual development. Mazhar's relational ontology, by contrast, insists that the individual self is constituted through relationships and that genuine human development is impossible outside of genuine communities of solidarity and care. This communitarian orientation is more consistent with the actual conditions of life of the farming communities of the Bengal delta, and it generates a political philosophy that is more directly relevant to the conditions of postcolonial Bangladesh, than Iqbal's dynamic individualism.

Mawdudi's political philosophy, which has been the foundational framework for the Islamist political movements of South Asia including Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, represents a very different response to the challenge of colonial modernity than either Iqbal's or Mazhar's. Where Iqbal was primarily concerned with the philosophical reconstruction of Islamic thought and the spiritual regeneration of Muslim individuals and communities, Mawdudi's primary concern was with the establishment of the Islamic state: the political order in which the sovereignty of God would be expressed through the implementation of the sharia through the coercive apparatus of the state.

Mazhar's critique of Mawdudi's political philosophy is the most explicit dimension of his engagement with the tradition of modern Islamic political thought. He identifies three fundamental errors in Mawdudi's framework. First, the reduction of Islam to a political ideology, which Mawdudi himself explicitly endorsed and which is one of the most distinctive and most philosophically questionable features of his thought. Second, the equation of the sovereignty of God with the political sovereignty of a specific class of religious scholars who claim the authority to interpret and implement the divine will through the mechanisms of the state. And third, the reduction of the rich and complex ethical and spiritual tradition of Islam to a set of legal rules and political prescriptions that can be enforced through the coercive power of the state.

Each of these errors, in Mazhar's analysis, is not merely a philosophical mistake; it is a betrayal of the genuine values of the Islamic tradition. The reduction of Islam to a political ideology betrays the transcendence of the divine, which always exceeds any specific political program or institutional arrangement. The equation of divine sovereignty with the political authority of religious scholars betrays the spiritual equality of all human beings before the divine, which is one of the fundamental principles of the Islamic tradition. And the reduction of the ethical and spiritual tradition to a set of legal rules betrays the inner dimension of the tradition, the emphasis on the cultivation of the heart and the transformation of consciousness that is the primary concern of the Sufi tradition and that Mazhar regards as the most philosophically deep and most politically important dimension of Islamic thought.

The Egyptian philosopher Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, whose hermeneutical approach to the Quran Mazhar has engaged with, provides an important reference point for understanding the intellectual tradition within which Mazhar's critique of political Islamism is situated. Abu Zayd,

who was declared an apostate and forced to flee Egypt in 1995 for his arguments that the Quran must be understood as a human text produced in a specific historical context rather than as a direct divine communication to be applied without historical mediation, argued for a reading of the Islamic tradition that placed interpretation, hermeneutics, at the center of Islamic intellectual practice. His argument that the politicization of Islam, its reduction to a political ideology, was a betrayal of the tradition's genuine intellectual and spiritual depth, converges directly with Mazhar's critique of political Islam.

The Tunisian philosopher Abdelmajid Charfi, whose work on the reformulation of Islam in the contemporary world has been one of the most significant contributions to contemporary Islamic thought, offers another important comparative reference point. Charfi's argument that the historical development of Islamic jurisprudence and theology was shaped by specific historical and political conditions that no longer obtain, and that a genuinely contemporary Islamic thought must be developed that is adequate to the conditions of modernity rather than simply applying the categories developed in a very different historical context, is broadly consonant with Mazhar's philosophical project, though the specific intellectual traditions they draw on differ significantly.

CHAPTER TEN: THE CONSTITUTION AND THE DIVINE: JURISPRUDENTIAL INTERSECTIONS

The intersection between Mazhar's Islamic philosophical thought and his constitutional theory is one of the most intellectually original dimensions of his work, and it deserves sustained analysis because it addresses questions that are of the most urgent contemporary importance in Bangladesh and across the Muslim world: questions about the relationship between Islamic values and constitutional governance, about the proper role of religious principles in constitutional law, and about how a Muslim-majority society can develop constitutional arrangements that are both genuinely democratic and genuinely respectful of the Islamic heritage of its population.

The post-2024 constitutional debates in Bangladesh have brought these questions into sharp political focus. The fall of the Hasina government in August 2024 created a constitutional vacuum and an opportunity for fundamental constitutional reform, and the question of the relationship between the constitutional framework and the Islamic identity of the Bangladeshi people has been one of the central questions in these debates. The secular nationalist tradition has insisted that the constitutional framework must be grounded in secular principles and that any attempt to introduce Islamic criteria into the constitution would be a regression toward the Pakistani model of Islamic statehood that the Liberation War was fought to escape. The Islamist tradition has argued, with renewed confidence in the post-Hasina political climate, that the constitution must reflect the Islamic identity of the majority population and must include provisions that guarantee the compatibility of the legal framework with the principles of the sharia.

Mazhar's constitutional proposals, developed most fully in his 2023 book and elaborated in numerous interviews and articles since the 2024 uprising, occupy a different position. He has argued for a constitution that recognizes the Islamic heritage of Bangladesh as a dimension of the nation's cultural identity without establishing Islam as the basis of the political system or making the sharia the criterion of constitutional validity. This position attempts to navigate between the Scylla of secular nationalism, which denies the relevance of Islamic values to the public sphere, and the Charybdis of political Islamism, which reduces those values to a set of legal prescriptions to be enforced by the state.

The philosophical framework that enables this navigation is Mazhar's distinction, developed in his Islamic philosophical work, between the spiritual values cultivated by the Islamic tradition and the specific political and legal arrangements through which those values might be expressed. The constitution, in his analysis, should embody the spiritual values of justice, compassion, equality, and solidarity that the Islamic tradition cultivates, not because these are specifically Islamic values but because they are the values that the vast majority of the Bangladeshi people have internalized through their immersion in the Islamic cultural heritage of their society, and because they are values that can be affirmed by all members of the community regardless of their specific religious affiliation.

This approach has resonances with the concept of overlapping consensus developed by the political philosopher John Rawls: the idea that in a pluralistic democratic society, a shared public political framework can be constructed on the basis of values that are supported by different comprehensive doctrines, religious and non-religious, for different reasons. The Islamic tradition, the secular humanist tradition, and other cultural and philosophical traditions present in Bangladesh can all support the values of justice, equality, and human dignity, though they derive those values from different foundations and express them in different ways. A constitution that embodies these values does not need to ground them in any specific religious tradition, though it can acknowledge the role that the Islamic tradition has played in forming the moral culture of the Bangladeshi people.

The jurisprudential tradition of *maqasid al-sharia*, the objectives of Islamic law, provides another important resource for Mazhar's constitutional philosophy. The tradition of *maqasid*, developed by scholars like Al-Ghazali, Al-Shatibi, and Ibn Ashur, holds that the specific rules and prescriptions of Islamic law are instruments for the achievement of certain fundamental objectives: the protection of life, the protection of mind or reason, the protection of lineage or family, the protection of property, and the protection of religion. The contemporary scholar Jasser Auda has extended this tradition to argue that the *maqasid* provide the foundational framework for an Islamic approach to constitutional governance, one that evaluates specific constitutional provisions not by their formal conformity with specific Quranic verses or Hadith but by their contribution to the achievement of the fundamental objectives of human flourishing that the Islamic legal tradition was designed to serve.

Mazhar's constitutional philosophy draws implicitly on this *maqasid* framework, though he does not typically frame it in the technical language of classical jurisprudence. His insistence that the constitution must protect the conditions of human flourishing, including the ecological conditions examined in Part Three and the conditions of political self-determination that are the

focus of his constitutional theory, is consistent with the maqasid framework's emphasis on the protection of life and reason as fundamental objectives of any just constitutional order. His critique of the existing Bangladeshi constitutional framework, and his proposals for its fundamental transformation, are grounded in the argument that the existing framework fails to protect these fundamental conditions of human flourishing for the majority of the Bangladeshi population, and that genuine constitutional reform requires a fundamental reorientation of the constitutional framework around these conditions rather than around the formal procedural requirements that currently dominate constitutional discourse.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE QUESTION OF RELIGION AS DEFINED BY THE WEST: MAZHAR'S EPISTEMOLOGICAL CHALLENGE

One of the most provocative and philosophically significant claims in Mazhar's recent interviews and writings is his assertion, made in a 2024 interview with Prothom Alo, that religion as we still see it is defined by the West. This claim, which initially appears paradoxical, the idea that Islam, one of the world's major religious traditions with its own extensive philosophical and theological literature, is somehow defined by Western concepts, is in fact a philosophically important argument about the epistemological conditions under which the Islamic tradition is currently being understood and contested in Bangladesh and across the Muslim world.

The argument runs as follows. The modern Western concept of religion, as it developed in the context of the Reformation, the Wars of Religion, and the subsequent development of the secular state in Europe, is a concept that defines religion as a specific domain of human life, concerned with beliefs about the supernatural, personal practices of worship and devotion, and membership in specific institutional communities, that is distinct from and properly separate from the domains of politics, economics, law, and science. This concept of religion as a specific, delimited domain of human life, distinct from and properly subordinate to the secular domains of state and market, was not the self-understanding of the Islamic tradition before its encounter with European colonialism; classical Islamic thought did not recognize a separate domain of the religious distinct from the political, the legal, and the ethical in the way that the modern Western concept of religion presupposes.

The imposition of this Western concept of religion on the Islamic tradition, as Mazhar argues, has had profound and distorting effects on the way the tradition understands itself and on the political conflicts that develop around its role in society. Both the secular nationalist insistence that religion must be confined to the private sphere and the Islamist counter-insistence that Islam is a comprehensive way of life that must organize all domains of human existence are, in Mazhar's analysis, responses to the same epistemological framework, the Western concept of religion as a distinct and bounded domain; they are competing answers to the question of where that domain's boundaries should lie rather than challenges to the epistemological framework that generates the question.

The Islamic philosophical tradition as Mazhar reads it, particularly the tradition of the Sufi orders and the syncretic spiritual traditions of the Bengal delta, did not understand itself as a

religion in the Western sense: as a set of beliefs about the supernatural supplemented by specific ritual practices and institutional affiliation. It understood itself as a way of life, a comprehensive orientation of the entire person toward the divine ground of existence, an orientation that expressed itself in all dimensions of life, from agriculture and commerce to art and poetry to the governance of community, not through the imposition of specific legal rules but through the cultivation of specific forms of attention, care, and responsibility that shaped the entire texture of individual and social life.

This understanding of Islam as a way of life rather than as a religion in the Western sense has important implications for the debate about the relationship between Islam and constitutional governance. If Islam is a way of life characterized by specific forms of attention, care, and responsibility rather than a set of specific legal rules to be enforced by the state, then the question of the relationship between Islam and constitutional governance is not the question of whether the state should enforce the sharia but the question of how the constitutional framework can create conditions that are conducive to the cultivation of these forms of attention, care, and responsibility among the members of the community. This is a very different question, and it generates a very different kind of constitutional thinking.

The implications of this reframing for the specific debates about religion and politics in contemporary Bangladesh are significant. It suggests that the secularist demand that religion be confined to the private sphere is asking the wrong question: not how much influence religion should have in the public sphere but how the public sphere can be organized in ways that are genuinely respectful of the spiritual dimensions of the lives of the citizens who inhabit it. And it suggests that the Islamist demand for the constitutional establishment of the sharia is also asking the wrong question: not how the divine law can be enforced through state power but how the forms of life that the Islamic tradition cultivates can be expressed and supported through the political arrangements of the community.

Mazhar's alternative question, the question of how political arrangements can support the cultivation of roohaniath, spirituality, among the members of the community, is not a question that has a determinate constitutional answer. It is a question that must be addressed through ongoing democratic deliberation among the members of the community, and the answers will inevitably vary as the community's understanding of its own spiritual heritage and its own political needs develops over time. But it is the right question, in Mazhar's analysis, precisely because it takes seriously both the spiritual dimension of the lives of the Bangladeshi people and the democratic requirement that the political community be the genuine author of its own constitutional arrangements.

CHAPTER TWELVE: THE COMPARATIVE JURISPRUDENCE OF RELIGION AND STATE: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES AND BANGALDESHI APPLICATIONS

The question of the relationship between religion and constitutional order is not, of course, a question unique to Bangladesh. It is one of the most contested and most important questions in contemporary constitutional theory and comparative constitutional law, and the specific

Bangladeshi debates about the relationship between Islam and the constitution can be illuminated by examination of the comparative constitutional landscape and the theoretical frameworks that scholars have developed for analyzing it.

The spectrum of constitutional arrangements for the relationship between religion and the state in Muslim-majority countries is wide. At one end of the spectrum, Turkey under the Kemalist republic established a strict separation between religion and state, banning the manifestation of religious symbols in public institutions and restricting the political activities of religious organizations, a model that has been significantly modified under Erdogan but that continues to shape Turkish constitutional culture. At the other end, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Pakistan have different forms of constitutional arrangement in which the sharia plays a significant role in the formal constitutional framework, though the specific mechanisms differ considerably.

The more interesting cases for comparative analysis of Mazhar's constitutional proposals are the cases of constitutional democracies that have developed more nuanced approaches to the relationship between religion and the state: Turkey's ongoing negotiation between secular constitutionalism and Islamic political culture, Indonesia's Pancasila framework that affirms belief in God without establishing any specific religion, Tunisia's 2014 constitution that recognized Islam as the religion of the state while affirming the freedom of conscience and the equality of all citizens, and the various forms of Islamic constitutionalism that scholars have analyzed in countries like Malaysia and Jordan.

The Tunisian case is particularly instructive because it represents one of the most sophisticated recent attempts to develop a constitutional framework that acknowledges the Islamic heritage of the society while maintaining the commitments to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law that the post-Arab Spring transition demanded. The 2014 Tunisian constitution, developed through a genuinely deliberative constituent assembly process after the Jasmine Revolution of 2011, navigated the tension between the Islamist Ennahda party's demand for a constitution grounded in Islamic principles and the secular civil society's demand for a constitution grounded in universal human rights through a series of carefully crafted compromises that acknowledged both sets of demands without fully satisfying either.

Mazhar's reading of the Tunisian constitutional experience, which he has addressed in his writings on the Bangladeshi constitutional situation, is nuanced and critical. He acknowledges the significance of the achievement: a Muslim-majority society developing a democratic constitution through genuine deliberative process, finding a balance between Islamic heritage and democratic governance that was at least momentarily stable. But he also sees the limitation of the compromise: it addressed the question of the role of Islam in the constitutional framework primarily as a question of text and doctrine, of what the constitution says about Islam, rather than as a question of practice and community, of how the constitutional framework creates conditions for the genuine expression of the spiritual heritage of the Tunisian people.

The Indonesian case of the Pancasila, the five principles that form the philosophical foundation of the Indonesian state, offers a different approach. The first of the five principles, Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa, belief in the one and only God, acknowledges the religious dimension of Indonesian public life without establishing any specific religion or requiring the state to

implement any specific religious law. This approach has been described as a form of religious pluralism, acknowledging the religious character of the Indonesian people while maintaining the political equality of all religious traditions within the framework of the state.

Mazhar has expressed qualified admiration for the Indonesian approach, seeing in it a creative attempt to navigate between secular nationalism and religious politics that acknowledges the spiritual dimension of public life without the theocratic implications of political Islam. But he also sees its limitations: the Pancasila's acknowledgment of belief in God is abstract and formal, disconnected from the specific spiritual traditions and the specific cultural practices through which Indonesian Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists actually live their religious lives. It acknowledges the spiritual dimension of public life without creating any meaningful conditions for the expression and cultivation of that spiritual dimension within the political framework.

The model that Mazhar's constitutional proposals most closely approach, though he does not use this terminology, is what constitutional scholars have called transformative constitutionalism: a model of constitutional governance in which the constitution is not merely a set of institutional arrangements but an active force for social transformation, a framework that sets out not only the structure of government but the values and the vision of the good society that the political community is committed to realizing over time. The transformative constitutional tradition, most fully developed in the South African post-apartheid constitutional context, holds that the constitution must not only protect existing rights but must actively work to transform the social and material conditions that prevent the full realization of those rights by the most marginalized members of the community.

Mazhar's constitutional proposals extend the transformative constitutional model to include the spiritual and ecological dimensions of human existence that the South African tradition, grounded in the liberal rights framework, does not address. He proposes a constitution that is not only committed to the transformation of the material conditions of the most marginalized members of the community but to the transformation of the spiritual and ecological conditions that make genuine human flourishing possible. This is a more ambitious constitutional vision than anything that has yet been realized in practice, but it is a philosophically coherent vision, grounded in a comprehensive understanding of the conditions of human flourishing that draws on the Islamic spiritual tradition, the Bengali philosophical heritage, and the most advanced contemporary thinking in political philosophy, constitutional theory, and ecological philosophy.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE 2024 UPRISING AND ISLAM: MAZHAR'S POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

The mass uprising of 2024 in Bangladesh, which resulted in the fall of the Hasina government and the opening of a new political moment in the country's history, provides the most important contemporary context for evaluating the political implications of Mazhar's Islamic philosophy. The uprising was simultaneously a political event, a constitutional crisis, and, in ways that Mazhar has been at pains to articulate, a spiritual event: an event in which the collective spiritual

resources of the Bangladeshi people, including the Islamic spiritual heritage that forms the deep cultural substrate of the society, were mobilized in a way that transformed the political landscape.

Mazhar's analysis of the 2024 uprising as a spiritual event draws on the conceptual resources developed throughout his intellectual career, and particularly on the concept of political spirituality that he examined in his engagement with Foucault's analysis of the Iranian Revolution in his book *Marx, Foucault O Roohaniath*. Like the Iranian Revolution that Foucault analyzed, the Bangladeshi uprising was not reducible to the rational self-interest calculations of individual political actors or to the class analysis that Marxist theory would predict. It was an event in which something happened to the collective consciousness of a people, in which the accumulated frustrations, the suppressed dignity, and the spiritual resources of the community were suddenly mobilized in a collective act of political refusal and political assertion that transcended the normal categories of political analysis.

But unlike Foucault's analysis of the Iranian Revolution, which remained at the level of phenomenological description without developing a normative framework for evaluating different forms of political spirituality, Mazhar's analysis of the Bangladeshi uprising is connected to a specific normative framework derived from the Islamic spiritual tradition and the Bengali philosophical heritage. The uprising was, in his analysis, not just any form of political spirituality; it was a specific form, grounded in the values of justice, dignity, and the equal worth of all human beings that the Islamic tradition cultivates, and directed against a specific form of political evil, the fascism of the Hasina government, that the Islamic tradition condemns in its most fundamental moral vocabulary.

The concept of *fasad fil ard*, corruption or disorder in the earth, which the Quran uses to describe the most severe forms of political evil, is directly relevant to Mazhar's analysis of the Hasina government and its relationship to the uprising. The Quranic condemnation of *fasad fil ard* is not merely a condemnation of specific corrupt practices; it is a condemnation of a systemic disorder in the social and political fabric, a condition in which the fundamental obligations of justice and care that constitute genuine political community have been replaced by a system of exploitation, deception, and violence that is antithetical to the divine will as expressed in the Islamic tradition. Mazhar's characterization of the Hasina government as fascist is grounded not only in a secular political analysis but in this theological framework: it is a government that has committed *fasad fil ard*, that has corrupted the earth through its systematic violation of the principles of justice and dignity that the Islamic tradition places at the center of political ethics.

The uprising, in this theological framework, is not merely a political rebellion against an unjust government; it is an expression of the divine will for justice manifesting itself through the collective spiritual resources of the Bangladeshi people. This is not a claim that the uprising was divinely ordained in the sense of being predetermined or inevitable; it is a claim that the values that animated the uprising, the values of justice, dignity, and the equal worth of all human beings, are the values that the Islamic tradition identifies as expressions of the divine will, and that the uprising therefore expressed something genuinely spiritual as well as genuinely political.

This theological analysis has specific political implications for the question of what the uprising demands in terms of constitutional transformation. If the uprising expressed the divine will for justice through the collective spiritual resources of the Bangladeshi people, then the constitutional transformation it demands must be adequate to this spiritual dimension: it must not merely produce a more effective set of institutional arrangements for the prevention of abuse of power but must create the conditions for the genuine expression of the spiritual values of justice, dignity, and solidarity that the uprising articulated. A merely procedural constitutional reform, one that changes the formal rules of political competition without addressing the spiritual and material conditions that make genuine political community possible, would betray the spiritual significance of the uprising.

The concept of shahada, witness or testimony, which is one of the central concepts in the Islamic tradition's understanding of the relationship between faith and political action, is also relevant to Mazhar's analysis of the uprising. The shahadah, the testimony that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is the messenger of God, is not merely a doctrinal affirmation; it is, in the philosophical tradition of the Islamic mystical thought that Mazhar draws on, an act of bearing witness to the divine reality against the false realities of social convention and political ideology. The student protesters of 2024 who risked their lives in the streets of Dhaka were, in this theological framework, bearing witness to the divine reality of justice against the false reality of the authoritarian state: they were acting as shahids, witnesses, in both the political and the spiritual sense.

This interpretation of the uprising as an act of shahada connects it to the longest tradition of Islamic political thought about the relationship between spiritual commitment and political action: the tradition that runs from the Prophet's own confrontation with the Quraysh oligarchy of Mecca through the martyrology of the early Islamic community to the contemporary tradition of Islamic political activism. It is a tradition that insists on the inseparability of faith and justice, that holds that genuine Islamic faith is not compatible with passive acceptance of injustice and that genuine political action for justice is an expression of faith rather than a departure from it.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE CONTROVERSY OF THE BLASPHEMY LAW AND INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM IN BANGLADESH

The question of blasphemy law and its relationship to intellectual freedom is one of the most practically urgent dimensions of Mazhar's engagement with Islamic jurisprudence and with the relationship between religion and the constitutional order. Bangladesh does not have a specific blasphemy law in the form familiar from Pakistan's notorious Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code, which prescribes the death penalty for blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad. But Bangladesh has provisions in its Penal Code, inherited from the colonial period, that criminalize deliberate insult to religious feelings and the publication of material likely to cause religious offence, and these provisions have been used against writers, artists, and intellectuals in ways that raise serious questions about the compatibility of current Bangladeshi law with both international human rights standards and with the jurisprudential principles of the Islamic tradition itself.

Mazhar has been personally affected by these provisions, most notably in the 1995 case examined in Part One, and he has developed an extensive theoretical critique of the use of religious insult provisions against intellectual and artistic expression. His critique operates at three levels: the level of Islamic jurisprudence, the level of constitutional theory, and the level of political analysis.

At the level of Islamic jurisprudence, Mazhar argues that the provisions of the Bangladeshi Penal Code that criminalize religious insult are not required by and are indeed inconsistent with the best traditions of Islamic jurisprudence on the question of freedom of thought and expression. The Islamic jurisprudential tradition has, at various points in its history, been remarkably tolerant of theological diversity and intellectual controversy, recognizing that genuine understanding of the divine truth requires freedom of inquiry and debate rather than the suppression of heterodox views. The great tradition of Kalam, Islamic theological disputation, and the tradition of philosophical inquiry associated with figures like Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd, involved vigorous and sometimes radical departures from orthodox theological positions that would have been prosecutable under many contemporary interpretations of blasphemy law.

The Mutazilite school, which flourished in the eighth and ninth centuries and which was the dominant school of Islamic theology at the court of the Abbasid caliphs, developed a rationalist theology that applied the methods of Greek philosophy to the interpretation of Islamic doctrine and that reached conclusions about the nature of God and the Quran that many contemporary Muslims would regard as heretical. The Mutazilites' claim that the Quran was created rather than eternal, for example, is a position that was defended by some of the most brilliant minds of classical Islamic civilization and that was for a period the official theology of the Abbasid state, yet it is a position that would be considered blasphemous by many contemporary Sunni Muslims.

The history of Islamic intellectual culture demonstrates that the tradition has been far more intellectually diverse and far more tolerant of theological controversy than its contemporary conservative interpreters claim. Mazhar's argument is that this tradition of intellectual freedom is not an aberration from genuine Islam but an expression of its deepest commitments: the commitment to the development of understanding through rigorous inquiry and honest dialogue, the commitment to the equal dignity of all rational beings as potential bearers of genuine insight, and the commitment to the divine truth as something that transcends the boundaries of any specific theological school or interpretive tradition.

At the level of constitutional theory, Mazhar's critique of religious insult provisions draws on the international human rights framework and on the principles of constitutional democracy. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Bangladesh is a signatory, protects freedom of expression as a fundamental right and limits the permissible restrictions on that right to specific and narrow categories: protection of the rights of others, protection of national security, public order, health, or morals. The restriction of intellectual and artistic expression in the name of protection of religious feelings does not fall within these narrow categories, and the application of religious insult provisions to serious intellectual and artistic expression is therefore, in Mazhar's analysis, a violation of Bangladesh's international human rights obligations.

At the level of political analysis, Mazhar argues that the use of religious insult provisions against intellectual and artistic expression serves a specific political function: it gives religious conservatives a legal weapon with which to silence voices that challenge the authority of the existing religious establishment and that open up the space for critical engagement with the Islamic tradition. The pattern of blasphemy charges across Muslim-majority countries, in which the targets are typically members of religious minorities, heterodox thinkers, liberal intellectuals, and others whose voices challenge the cultural and political authority of conservative religious institutions, reveals the political character of these provisions: they are instruments of political control masquerading as protection of the sacred.

This analysis connects the question of blasphemy law to the broader analysis of the weaponization of law that Mazhar developed in his commentary on the 1995 case, examined in Part Two. The use of formally valid legal provisions to suppress political dissent and intellectual heterodoxy is not confined to explicitly political laws; it can operate through nominally religious laws whose actual political function is to maintain the cultural and political authority of conservative institutions at the expense of intellectual freedom and political pluralism. A genuine commitment to the rule of law requires not merely the formal application of existing legal provisions but a critical analysis of the political functions those provisions serve and a willingness to challenge provisions whose actual operation is inconsistent with the principles of justice and intellectual freedom that the rule of law is supposed to protect.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: RELIGION AND THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITY: CONTEMPORARY THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The final chapter of Part Four examines the relationship between Mazhar's Islamic political philosophy and the most significant contemporary developments in political theory, philosophy of religion, and Islamic studies, assessing his relevance to the theoretical debates of the 2020s and beyond.

The most important recent theoretical development relevant to Mazhar's Islamic political philosophy is the growing literature on what has been called post-secular political theory: the theoretical tradition associated with thinkers like Jurgen Habermas, Charles Taylor, and Craig Calhoun that argues for a reconceptualization of the relationship between religion and political life in contemporary democratic societies. The post-secular position challenges the secularization thesis, the claim that the development of modernity inevitably produces the progressive decline of religion's social significance, by pointing to the persistent and indeed growing significance of religion in political life across the world, including in societies that were supposed to be models of secular modernity.

Habermas's concept of the translation requirement, the idea that religious arguments can legitimately enter the public political sphere but must be translated into secular terms that all citizens can engage with regardless of their specific religious commitments, is directly relevant to Mazhar's challenge to the binary of secular nationalism versus political Islam. Mazhar's insistence that the Islamic tradition's values of justice, dignity, and solidarity can be affirmed by

all members of the Bangladeshi community regardless of their specific religious affiliation is, in effect, a form of the translation that Habermas advocates. But Mazhar's approach is more generous to the religious tradition than Habermas's: it does not require that the specifically religious content of the values be stripped away in the translation process but only that the political expression of these values be framed in terms accessible to all citizens.

Charles Taylor's work on the sources of the self and on the relationship between morality and spirituality is also relevant to Mazhar's project. Taylor's argument that modern Western moral life is grounded in a set of moral sources that include, among others, the tradition of religious ethics and that the secular liberal political theory that claims to have transcended these sources has not actually done so but has merely made them implicit rather than explicit, converges with Mazhar's insistence that the secular nationalist political culture of Bangladesh is not genuinely secular in any philosophically robust sense but is rather a specific cultural tradition, the culture of the educated urban Bengali elite, that has been presented as universal and secular while actually excluding the cultural and spiritual heritage of the vast majority of the population.

The Moroccan philosopher Mohammed Abed al-Jabri's work on the Arab political mind, already mentioned in relation to the Sufi philosophical tradition, offers important challenges to Mazhar's Islamic political philosophy that deserve serious engagement. Al-Jabri argued that the dominant modes of thought in Arab-Islamic intellectual culture, including the Sufi philosophical tradition and the mystical dimension of Islamic theology, have been characterized by a fundamentally Gnostic and totalizing epistemological orientation that has made it difficult to develop the analytic and critical capacities necessary for genuine democratic political culture. This is a serious challenge to any project, like Mazhar's, that draws heavily on the Sufi tradition as a resource for political philosophy, and Mazhar's response to it requires careful attention.

Mazhar's implicit response to the Al-Jabri challenge is developed through his engagement with the specific Bengali expression of the Sufi tradition, which he argues is significantly different in its epistemological character from the Arab Sufi tradition that Al-Jabri was primarily analyzing. The Bengali Baul and Fakiri tradition, while drawing on the Islamic Sufi tradition, incorporated strong elements of the critical, iconoclastic spirit of the Vaishnava bhakti movement and of the anti-authoritarian traditions of the Bengal delta that gave it a more analytically critical and more politically radical character than the more mystically oriented traditions of the Arab and Persian Sufi world. The Lalon tradition, with its explicit challenge to the authority of the religious establishment, its insistence on the irreducibility of individual spiritual experience to any doctrinal formulation, and its commitment to the equal spiritual dignity of all human beings, represents, in Mazhar's analysis, a form of Sufi thought that is not vulnerable to Al-Jabri's critique of the Gnostic totalism of the Arab philosophical tradition.

The Palestinian philosopher Sari Nusseibeh's recent work on what he calls a secular Islam, an Islam that has returned to its Mu'tazilite rationalist roots and that is genuinely compatible with the principles of democratic governance and intellectual freedom, provides another contemporary reference point for Mazhar's project. While Nusseibeh approaches the question from the specific context of Palestinian intellectual and political life, his argument that the resources for a genuinely democratic Islamic political culture exist within the Islamic intellectual

tradition itself, and that the task is to recover and develop these resources rather than to abandon the tradition, converges with Mazhar's fundamental intellectual orientation.

The Pakistani philosopher Khurshid Ahmad Nadeem's work on the compatibility of Islam with democratic governance, the Egyptian philosopher Amr Hamzawy's analysis of liberal Islamic thought in the Arab world, and the Senegalese Islamic scholar Cheikh Hamidou Kane's literary-philosophical exploration of the encounter between Islamic culture and Western modernity, all provide additional contemporary reference points for situating Mazhar's Islamic political philosophy in the global landscape of contemporary Islamic intellectual life. The common thread running through all of these projects, and through Mazhar's project, is the conviction that the resources for a genuinely democratic, genuinely just, and genuinely spiritually rich Islamic political culture exist within the Islamic tradition itself, and that the task of contemporary Islamic political philosophy is to recover and develop these resources in dialogue with the best contemporary thinking in political philosophy, constitutional theory, and the philosophy of religion.

The growing literature on what has been called Islamic feminism is also directly relevant to Mazhar's Islamic political philosophy. The work of scholars like Amina Wadud, Fatima Mernissi, and Kecia Ali has demonstrated that the Islamic tradition contains significant resources for a feminist reading, and that the patriarchal interpretations that have dominated the public expression of Islamic gender norms are not the necessary or the only possible reading of the tradition. Mazhar's engagement with the question of women's role in the Islamic tradition, developed most fully in the context of his analysis of women's agricultural knowledge in Part Three but present also in his Islamic philosophical writing, converges with this tradition of feminist Islamic scholarship in its insistence that the egalitarian impulse of the Islamic tradition, expressed in the Quran's affirmation of the equal dignity of men and women before God, must be recovered from beneath the patriarchal interpretations that have been institutionalized through the classical jurisprudential tradition.

The specific dimension of Islamic feminist thought most relevant to Mazhar's project is the tradition of Islamic feminism associated with the concept of *khilafa*: the understanding of human beings as the vicegerents or stewards of God's creation, bearing equal responsibility for the care and governance of the natural world. This tradition, which has been developed most extensively in the context of Islamic environmental thought but which has important implications for political philosophy more broadly, grounds a commitment to gender equality not in the abstract universalism of liberal rights theory but in the Islamic theological understanding of the equal responsibility of all human beings for the care of the world. It is a foundation for gender equality that is both genuinely Islamic and genuinely radical, and it is consistent with the philosophical framework that Mazhar has developed through his engagement with the Sufi tradition and the Bengali philosophical heritage.

CONCLUDING NOTE TO PART FOUR: BETWEEN THE MIHRAB AND THE MARKETPLACE

Part Four of this textbook has examined Farhad Mazhar's engagement with Islamic thought in its full philosophical, jurisprudential, and political depth. The analysis has traced his engagement from the foundational concepts of Islamic metaphysics through the traditions of Islamic jurisprudence to the contemporary debates about Islam, democracy, and constitutional governance in Bangladesh and beyond. It has shown that his Islamic philosophy is not an addition to or a departure from his broader intellectual project but is integrally connected to all of its other dimensions: to his relational ontology derived from the Sufi tradition, to his concept of roohaniath, to his critique of both secular nationalism and political Islam, to his constitutional proposals, and to his ecological philosophy.

The central claim of Part Four has been that Mazhar has developed a genuinely original Islamic political philosophy, one that is grounded in the specific spiritual heritage of the Bengal delta while engaging seriously with the broader traditions of Islamic thought and with the most important contemporary developments in political philosophy and constitutional theory. This philosophy is neither a simple appropriation of Western liberalism in Islamic dress nor a simple revival of classical Islamic political thought; it is a genuine synthesis, achieved through decades of rigorous intellectual work, of the best philosophical resources available within the Islamic tradition and the best philosophical resources available within the Western and postcolonial traditions with which Mazhar has been in dialogue throughout his intellectual career.

The political moment of Bangladesh in 2024 and 2025 has given this intellectual project a new urgency. The constitutional debates opened by the fall of the Hasina government, the continuing contestation between secular nationalism and political Islam in the political landscape of post-uprising Bangladesh, and the international attention focused on Bangladesh as a country navigating the difficult challenge of building a genuinely democratic political culture in a Muslim-majority society, all create conditions in which Mazhar's Islamic political philosophy is directly and urgently relevant.

The most important contribution that Part Four has identified in Mazhar's Islamic political philosophy is the concept of roohaniath as a political category: the claim that genuine political community requires not only the right institutional arrangements but the cultivation of specific forms of spiritual awareness, care, and solidarity among the members of the community, and that the Islamic tradition, properly understood, is a resource for this cultivation rather than a threat to it. This claim challenges both the secular nationalist tradition's dismissal of religion as a potential threat to democratic politics and the Islamist tradition's reduction of Islamic values to a set of legal prescriptions to be enforced by the state. It proposes instead a third path, a politics of spiritual cultivation that draws on the deepest resources of the Islamic tradition in the service of genuinely democratic and genuinely just political community.

Between the mihrab, the prayer niche in the mosque that orients the worshipper toward the sacred direction, and the marketplace, the space of economic exchange and political contestation, Mazhar has spent his intellectual career insisting that the distance is shorter than either secular modernity or religious conservatism would have us believe. The spiritual values cultivated in the mihrab, properly understood, demand the transformation of the marketplace in the direction of justice, solidarity, and the equal dignity of all human beings. And the struggles of the marketplace, the struggles of farmers for their seeds, of students for their freedom, of

communities for their self-determination, are, when they are genuine, expressions of the spiritual values that the mihrab is supposed to cultivate. The work of Farhad Mazhar is, in its deepest register, an attempt to restore the connection between these two spaces, to refuse the separation that both secular modernity and religious conservatism have enforced, and to articulate a vision of political and spiritual life in which each nourishes and demands the other.

Part Five of this textbook will examine Mazhar's constitutional theory in its full systematic development, analyzing the philosophical foundations of his concept of popular sovereignty and constituent power, his critique of the existing Bangladeshi constitutional framework, his proposals for fundamental constitutional reform, and the significance of his constitutional theory for the broader global debates about popular sovereignty, democratic legitimacy, and the relationship between constituent power and constitutional order.

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On contemporary Islamic feminist thought, Amina Wadud's *Quran and Woman* (1992) and her *Inside the Gender Jihad* (2006), Fatima Mernissi's *Beyond the Veil* (1975) and *The Veil and the Male Elite* (1991), and Kecia Ali's *Sexual Ethics and Islam* (2006) provide the essential texts. For the specific Bengali context, Dina Siddiqi's work on gender and Islamic politics in Bangladesh, published in various academic journals over the past decade, is essential.

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End of Part Four. Part Five will examine Farhad Mazhar's constitutional theory in its full systematic development, analyzing the philosophical foundations of his concept of popular sovereignty and constituent power, his critique of the existing Bangladeshi constitutional framework, his concrete proposals for fundamental constitutional reform, and the significance of his constitutional thought for the 2024 uprising and its aftermath, placing his constitutional philosophy in dialogue with the major traditions of contemporary constitutional theory, the theory of the constituent power developed by Emmanuel Sieyes and its subsequent elaboration by Carl Schmitt, Hannah Arendt, and contemporary political philosophers including Jason Frank, Bonnie Honig, and Andreas Kalyvas.

PART FIVE: THE CONSTITUENT POWER AND THE PEOPLE

Popular Sovereignty, Constitutional Theory, the Jurisprudence of Political Transformation, and the Crisis of Constitutional Legitimacy in Bangladesh

PROLOGUE TO PART FIVE: THE CONSTITUTION AS BATTLEFIELD

Every constitution tells a story about who the people are, who gets to speak in their name, and how much of that speaking is genuine. In the best cases, constitutions are living instruments that express the authentic collective self-determination of free communities, frameworks through which communities constitute themselves as political societies and through which they sustain and renew that constitution over time. In the worst cases, constitutions are instruments of domination: legal texts whose high-sounding language about popular sovereignty, fundamental rights, and the rule of law conceals the reality of political power concentrated in a small elite and exercised without genuine accountability to those it governs. Between these extremes lies the vast middle ground of actual constitutional history, in which constitutions are simultaneously sites of genuine aspiration and instruments of specific power interests, in which the language of popular sovereignty coexists with the reality of elite capture, and in which the formal mechanisms of constitutional democracy operate alongside informal mechanisms of exclusion and control that hollow out those mechanisms from within.

Farhad Mazhar's constitutional theory is organized around this tension between the aspiration and the reality of constitutional governance, and it represents one of the most sustained and most philosophically rigorous attempts in the contemporary postcolonial world to think through what genuine popular sovereignty would require and how the gap between constitutional aspiration and political reality might be bridged. His constitutional thought is not the thought of a legal technician proposing adjustments to existing institutional arrangements. It is the thought of a philosopher who has spent five decades engaging with the conditions of political life in Bangladesh, who has watched successive constitutional arrangements fail to deliver the genuine self-determination of the Bangladeshi people, and who has developed, through this sustained engagement, a comprehensive philosophical framework for understanding both why those failures have occurred and what genuine constitutional transformation would require.

The philosophical framework that Mazhar has developed is grounded in the concept of constituent power, the *pouvoir constituant* that Emmanuel Sieyès first articulated in his 1789 pamphlet *What is the Third Estate?* and that has been one of the central and most contested concepts in political philosophy and constitutional theory ever since. But Mazhar's engagement with the concept of constituent power is not simply a reiteration of the Sieyesian tradition. It is a critical and creative transformation of that tradition in the light of the specific conditions of postcolonial Bangladesh, the specific philosophical resources of the Bengali tradition, and the most important contemporary developments in political philosophy and constitutional theory. The result is a constitutional philosophy that is both deeply rooted in the specific historical conditions of Bangladesh and genuinely relevant to the broader global debates about popular sovereignty, democratic legitimacy, and the conditions of genuinely free political community.

Part Five of this textbook examines this constitutional philosophy in its full systematic development. It begins with the foundational concepts, tracing Mazhar's understanding of constituent power, popular sovereignty, and the relationship between the constituent and the constituted in the context of the specific Bangladeshi experience. It examines his critique of the 1972 constitution and of the successive constitutional amendments that have transformed it, analyzing this critique in the light of both the jurisprudential principles of constitutional law and the philosophical principles of his broader intellectual project. It examines his proposals for fundamental constitutional reform, developed most fully in his 2023 book *Gono-ovyutthan o*

Gathan and elaborated in numerous subsequent interventions, analyzing those proposals in relation to the tradition of constitutional design theory and the specific conditions of post-uprising Bangladesh. And it assesses the significance of his constitutional theory for the broader global debates about the conditions of genuine democratic governance in the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER ONE: THE CONCEPT OF CONSTITUENT POWER: A PHILOSOPHICAL GENEALOGY

The concept of constituent power is one of the most philosophically rich and most politically contentious concepts in the entire tradition of political and constitutional thought. Its genealogy traces through some of the most important moments in the history of modern political philosophy, and Mazhar's engagement with it cannot be fully understood without tracing that genealogy and identifying the specific points at which his thought converges with and diverges from the major theoretical traditions.

The modern concept of constituent power was first given its canonical formulation by Emmanuel Sieyes in his revolutionary pamphlet *What is the Third Estate?*, published in January 1789 on the eve of the French Revolution. Sieyes's argument was deceptively simple but philosophically explosive: the nation, understood as the collective body of all those who live under the law and contribute to the social order, possesses an inherent and inalienable power to constitute itself as a political community, to give itself the political institutions and the legal framework under which it wishes to live. This constituent power, he argued, is prior to and superior to any constituted power, any specific set of institutions or legal arrangements that the constituent power has established. The nation always retains the right to reconstitute itself, to revise or replace the political institutions through which it governs itself, because the constituent power cannot be alienated or transferred to any of the specific institutions that it has brought into being.

The significance of Sieyes's formulation for the subsequent history of constitutional theory can hardly be overstated. By grounding political legitimacy in the constituent power of the nation rather than in the divine right of kings, in the authority of custom, or in the consent of the governed as expressed through specific constitutional procedures, Sieyes established the foundational principle of modern constitutionalism: the principle that all legitimate political authority derives from and is answerable to the people as the ultimate constituent power. But by insisting that the constituent power is always prior to and superior to any specific constitutional arrangement, he also established the philosophical foundation for the permanent possibility of constitutional revolution: the possibility that the people might, in exercising their constituent power, sweep away the existing constitutional order and replace it with something fundamentally different.

The subsequent history of the concept of constituent power in political philosophy is a history of attempts to contain and manage the revolutionary implications of Sieyes's formulation without abandoning its fundamental claim that political legitimacy derives from the constituent power of the people. Carl Schmitt's analysis of the constituent power in his *Constitutional Theory*,

published in 1928, represented the most rigorous and the most politically consequential attempt to work through the implications of the Sieyesian concept. Schmitt distinguished between the constituent power and the constituted power in terms that made the constituent power a permanent background presence that could be activated in moments of political crisis: the constituent power is never fully expressed or exhausted by any specific constitutional arrangement, and it can always reassert itself against the constitutional order when that order has failed to express the genuine will of the political community.

Schmitt's analysis has been enormously influential, but it is also deeply problematic, because Schmitt used the concept of constituent power to develop a theory of political sovereignty that emphasized the exception, the moment of crisis in which the normal constitutional order is suspended and the underlying constituent power reasserts itself, in ways that had explicitly antidemocratic and authoritarian implications. The famous Schmittian claim that sovereign is he who decides on the exception is an attempt to use the concept of constituent power to justify the concentration of political authority in a sovereign who stands above the normal constitutional order and who can suspend it at will, and it contributed directly to the legitimization of fascism in the German context of the 1930s.

The critical tradition in constitutional theory that has developed in response to Schmitt has sought to reclaim the concept of constituent power from its authoritarian appropriation and to develop an understanding of it that is genuinely democratic in its implications. The most important theoretical contributions in this tradition, for understanding Mazhar's constitutional philosophy, are Hannah Arendt's theory of political founding as developed in *On Revolution* (1963), Jurgen Habermas's discourse theory of law and democracy developed in *Between Facts and Norms* (1996), and the more recent work of Andreas Kalyvas, Jason Frank, and Bonnie Honig on the democratic dimensions of constituent power.

Arendt's analysis of political founding in *On Revolution* is directly relevant to Mazhar's constitutional theory because it addresses the specific problem that a founding moment always confronts: the problem of authorization. The constituent power that founds a new constitutional order must itself be authorized in some way, but it cannot be authorized by the constitutional order that it is in the process of creating. Arendt's response to this paradox of authorization is to argue that the constituent power authorizes itself through the act of beginning: the founding moment is not justified by any prior authority but creates its own authority through the very act of constitution. This is a radically democratic understanding of political founding, one that grounds constitutional legitimacy not in any pre-political or extra-political authority but in the act of political self-constitution itself.

The relevance of Arendt's analysis to the Bangladeshi constitutional situation, and specifically to the situation created by the mass uprising of 2024, is direct. The uprising created precisely the kind of founding moment that Arendt describes: a moment in which the existing constitutional order was swept away and in which the question of what kind of political community Bangladesh would be was posed again from the beginning. The question that Mazhar's constitutional theory addresses is the same question that Arendt's analysis addresses: how can the constituent power that has manifested itself in the uprising be channeled into the creation of a

genuinely legitimate new constitutional order, without being captured by the existing elite or betrayed by premature institutionalization?

Habermas's discourse theory of democracy, which grounds constitutional legitimacy in the conditions of genuine communicative action rather than in any specific institutional arrangement or any pre-political conception of the constituent power, offers a different but complementary approach to the problems that Mazhar's constitutional theory addresses. For Habermas, democratic legitimacy requires that the constitutional framework be the product of a genuine deliberative process in which all affected parties have the opportunity to participate as free and equal interlocutors, in which no one's perspective is excluded by economic or political power, and in which the outcome is determined by the force of the better argument rather than by the exercise of power. This ideal of deliberative democracy is, of course, never fully realized in practice, but it functions as a critical standard against which actual democratic processes can be evaluated and found wanting.

The most recent generation of theorists of constituent power, associated with what has been called the democratic theory of constitutionalism, has pushed the analysis in directions that are particularly relevant to Mazhar's constitutional philosophy. Jason Frank's *Constituent Moments* (2010) argues that constituent power is not a single founding act but an ongoing democratic practice, a continuous assertion of the people's self-constitutive authority that manifests itself at moments of political crisis and that challenges the tendency of constituted institutions to claim a monopoly on political representation. Bonnie Honig's *Democracy and the Foreigner* (2001) and her subsequent work develop the concept of agonistic democracy, a form of democratic politics that acknowledges the permanent contestation of the political community's identity and refuses the closure that constituted institutions tend to impose on the ongoing process of political self-determination. Andreas Kalyvas's *Democracy and the Politics of the Extraordinary* (2008) analyzes the role of exceptional political moments in democratic life, arguing that the extraordinary exercises of constituent power that occur in moments of political crisis are not aberrations from but constitutive features of genuine democratic politics.

Mazhar's constitutional theory engages, implicitly or explicitly, with all of these theoretical traditions. His concept of janagoner constituent power, the constituent power of the people, draws on the Sieyesian tradition's foundational insight that all legitimate political authority derives from the people as the constituent power. His analysis of the 1972 constitutional founding and its failures draws on the Schmittian tradition's attention to the relationship between the constituent and the constituted in specific historical situations. His proposals for constitutional reform through a genuine constituent assembly process draw on the Arendtian tradition's analysis of the conditions of genuine political founding. And his insistence that constitutional legitimacy requires ongoing democratic engagement rather than one-time constitutional founding converges with the democratic theory of constitutionalism developed by Frank, Honig, and Kalyvas.

But Mazhar's constitutional theory also differs from all of these Western theoretical traditions in ways that are philosophically significant. The most important difference is his insistence that genuine constituent power requires not only formal democratic procedures but the cultivation of the forms of political subjectivity, the forms of awareness, solidarity, and political agency, that

make genuine democratic participation possible. This insistence, grounded in his broader philosophical framework of roohaniath and bhav, adds a dimension to constitutional theory that the Western traditions have largely ignored: the dimension of political culture and political subjectivity as conditions of constitutional legitimacy that are not reducible to institutional design.

CHAPTER TWO: THE 1972 CONSTITUTION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The Constitution of Bangladesh, adopted in November 1972, was the founding document of the new state born from the Liberation War of 1971. It was drafted by the Constituent Assembly that had been elected in the 1970 general election as the National Assembly of Pakistan, and which reconstituted itself as the Constituent Assembly of Bangladesh after independence was declared in March 1971 and consolidated after the Pakistani army's surrender in December of that year. The constitution established a parliamentary system of government, affirmed four foundational principles of nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism, and provided a comprehensive framework of fundamental rights including the rights to equality, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, and the right to life and personal liberty.

Mazhar's critique of the 1972 constitution is one of the most systematic and most philosophically developed in the Bangladeshi intellectual tradition, and it has been one of the most controversial: it has attracted fierce criticism from the secular nationalist tradition that treats the 1972 constitution as the sacred text of the Liberation War, the authentic expression of the ideals for which the freedom fighters died, while simultaneously being regarded with deep suspicion by the Islamist tradition that sees his critique as insufficiently committed to the Islamic character of the Bangladeshi state. This double unpopularity, which mirrors the double unpopularity of his Islamic philosophy that we examined in Part Four, is itself evidence that his critique goes to the foundational assumptions shared by both of these competing traditions rather than merely challenging one from the perspective of the other.

The foundational critique that Mazhar makes of the 1972 constitution is a critique of its constituent legitimacy: the claim that the constitution was not, in fact, the product of a genuine exercise of constituent power by the people of Bangladesh. The Constituent Assembly that drafted the constitution was not a body elected specifically to draft a constitution; it was a body elected in 1970 to serve as the national parliament of Pakistan under the framework of the Legal Framework Order of that year. When that assembly reconstituted itself as the Constituent Assembly of Bangladesh, it was exercising a power that it had not been granted by those who elected it; its members had been elected to represent specific constituencies in the Pakistani parliament, not to exercise the constituent power of a new nation.

This is not merely a technical constitutional objection. It is a philosophical argument about the conditions of constitutional legitimacy. A constitution that is drafted by a body not specifically constituted for that purpose, by a body that lacks the specific mandate of the constituent power, cannot claim the full legitimacy that a genuine exercise of constituent power would give it. The members of the 1972 Constituent Assembly were legitimate representatives of their

constituencies in the specific context of the 1970 election, but that legitimacy did not extend automatically to the very different and much more fundamental act of constituting a new political order. The legitimacy of the constituent act requires a specific mandate, a specific authorization by the constituent power itself, that the 1972 Constituent Assembly did not possess.

The second major dimension of Mazhar's critique of the 1972 constitution concerns its content rather than its process. The four foundational principles of the constitution, nationalism, socialism, democracy, and secularism, reflected the specific ideological commitments of the Awami League and its leadership rather than any comprehensive and genuinely pluralistic engagement with the values and the aspirations of the Bangladeshi people as a whole. The exclusion of the Islamic heritage of Bangladesh from the constitutional framework, through the principle of secularism, was not the result of a genuine deliberative process in which the Islamic dimension of Bengali cultural identity was engaged with seriously and subjected to democratic debate; it was the imposition of a specific ideological position by the dominant political force of the moment.

This is not a simple argument for the inclusion of Islamic provisions in the constitution. Mazhar, as we have seen throughout the earlier parts of this textbook, is a severe critic of political Islam and of the attempt to base constitutional governance on the sharia. His argument is not that the 1972 constitution should have been more Islamic but that it should have been more genuinely pluralistic: that it should have emerged from a process of genuine deliberation among the full diversity of the Bangladeshi people, including both the secular nationalists and the diverse forms of Islamic cultural and political identity present in the society, rather than from the ideological preferences of a specific political party, however legitimate its role in leading the Liberation War.

The third dimension of Mazhar's critique concerns the constitutional framework's relationship to the economic and social conditions of the Bangladeshi people. The 1972 constitution included provisions guaranteeing a range of civil and political rights but its provisions concerning economic and social rights were significantly weaker, reflecting the political economy of the period and the influence of liberal constitutional models that prioritized civil and political rights over economic and social ones. The failure of the constitutional framework to genuinely protect the economic and social conditions of the majority of the Bangladeshi population, particularly the farming communities and the urban poor who constituted the overwhelming majority of the country's population, is, in Mazhar's analysis, not merely a failure of implementation but a structural feature of the constitutional design: a design that protected the rights of the educated urban middle class while leaving the material conditions of the rural majority unaddressed.

This economic critique of the constitutional framework is connected to Mazhar's broader analysis of the relationship between formal constitutional rights and substantive political sovereignty. A constitutional framework that guarantees formal civil and political rights but leaves untouched the economic structures that prevent the majority of the population from exercising those rights in any meaningful way is not a genuine expression of popular sovereignty. The farmer who formally enjoys the right to vote and the right to free expression but who is economically dependent on a landlord or a moneylender, whose seeds have been taken from her by the commercial seed system, and whose knowledge and judgment have been

systematically devalued by the development establishment, is not in a position to exercise the constituent power that the constitutional framework formally attributes to her. Genuine popular sovereignty requires not only formal political rights but the material conditions that make the exercise of those rights genuinely possible.

The successive constitutional amendments that have transformed the 1972 constitution over the following five decades have, in Mazhar's analysis, compounded rather than corrected these foundational deficiencies. The Fourth Amendment of 1975, through which Sheikh Mujibur Rahman transformed the parliamentary system into a presidential one-party state under the Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League, BAKSAL, was the most dramatic and the most philosophically significant of these amendments. It represented not merely a change in the forms of governance but a fundamental transformation of the constitutional order: the abolition of the multi-party democratic framework in favor of a political system in which the Awami League, rebranded as BAKSAL, was the only legal political organization and in which the president, namely Mujib himself, exercised virtually unlimited power.

Mazhar's analysis of the Fourth Amendment is philosophically illuminating for what it reveals about the structural weaknesses of the 1972 constitutional framework. The amendment was technically valid: it was passed by the Constituent Assembly through the procedures specified in the constitution. But its validity in procedural terms did not give it substantive legitimacy. A constitutional amendment that abolishes the multi-party democratic framework and concentrates power in a single political organization and its leader is an exercise of constituted power that exceeds the legitimate scope of the constituted power and that amounts, in substance, to a seizure of the constituent power itself. The constituted legislature does not have the authority to abolish the conditions of democratic pluralism through which the constituent power expresses itself; to do so is to usurp the constituent power rather than to exercise the constituted power that derives from it.

The constitutional tradition has developed the concept of unconstitutional constitutional amendments to address precisely this kind of situation: the situation in which the formal procedures of constitutional amendment are used to adopt amendments that are substantively incompatible with the fundamental principles of the constitutional order. The doctrine of basic structure, developed by the Indian Supreme Court in its landmark *Kesavananda Bharati* judgment of 1973, holds that certain fundamental features of the constitutional order, including the democratic and federal character of the Indian constitution, cannot be amended even by the procedures specified in the constitution itself, because they are constitutive of the constitutional identity of the political community and their elimination would amount to the replacement of the existing constitution with a fundamentally different one. This doctrine has been applied by courts in India, Bangladesh, and other jurisdictions to invalidate constitutional amendments that the courts have found to be incompatible with the basic structure of the constitutional order.

Mazhar's analysis of the Fourth Amendment and of subsequent constitutional amendments converges with the basic structure doctrine in its insistence that there are limits to what constituted power can do to the constitutional framework, that the constituent power always retains the right to resist and ultimately to reverse the usurpation of its authority by the constituted power. But he goes beyond the basic structure doctrine in arguing that the judicial

enforcement of these limits is not, in itself, sufficient to protect the constituent power from usurpation: the courts themselves are institutions of the constituted order, and they can only protect the constituent power against the most extreme and most obvious forms of usurpation. The more subtle forms of usurpation, the forms in which the formal procedures of constitutional democracy are maintained while the substance of popular sovereignty is hollowed out, require a different kind of protection: the continuous vigilance and the continuous political engagement of the constituent power itself, expressed through the social movements, the community organizations, and the political formations through which the people exercise their ongoing constituent authority.

CHAPTER THREE: THE FIFTEEN TH AMENDMENT AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS OF 2024

The Fifteenth Amendment to the Bangladesh Constitution, adopted in 2011 by the Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina, represents the most recent and the most politically consequential transformation of the constitutional framework and the most important immediate context for understanding both Mazhar's constitutional proposals and the constitutional dimensions of the 2024 uprising.

The Fifteenth Amendment made several significant changes to the constitutional framework, the most important of which was the restoration of secularism as a constitutional principle (secularism had been removed by the military government of Zia ur-Rahman in 1977 through the Fifth Amendment) while simultaneously retaining the declaration, introduced by Zia's Fifth Amendment, that Islam is the state religion of Bangladesh. This apparently paradoxical combination of secularism and an established religion was one of the most controversial features of the Fifteenth Amendment, and it generated precisely the kind of conceptual confusion about the relationship between religion and constitutional order that Mazhar's constitutional philosophy is designed to address.

But the most politically consequential feature of the Fifteenth Amendment was its abolition of the caretaker government system that had been established in 1996 to ensure that national elections were conducted under neutral administration rather than under the government of the incumbent party. The caretaker government system, which required the incumbent government to hand over power to a neutral caretaker administration before each national election, had been established in response to the experience of elections conducted under the incumbent government, which had been systematically manipulated in favor of the ruling party. The Fifteenth Amendment's abolition of this system removed what had been the primary institutional safeguard against electoral manipulation and created the conditions for the systematic abuse of state power to ensure electoral victories that the Awami League subsequently exploited with increasing intensity.

The constitutional architecture created by the Fifteenth Amendment, combined with the enactment of the Digital Security Act in 2018 and the subsequent use of that Act to criminalize political criticism of the government, created what Mazhar has described as a fascist

constitutional structure: a structure in which the formal procedures of constitutional democracy were maintained while their substance was systematically emptied of genuine popular sovereignty. The constitutional provisions for fundamental rights, for freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, were formally in force; but the actual exercise of those rights was increasingly criminalized through the Digital Security Act and through the systematic use of state violence against political opponents, journalists, and civil society organizations.

Mazhar's analysis of the constitutional crisis that culminated in the mass uprising of 2024 draws on all of the conceptual resources of his constitutional philosophy. The crisis was not merely a crisis of the Hasina government; it was a crisis of the constitutional framework that had allowed that government to develop and to sustain itself. The formal mechanisms of constitutional democracy, the elections, the parliament, the constitutional provisions for fundamental rights, had been systematically hollowed out by the combination of legal manipulation, institutional capture, and political violence that the Awami League government had employed. The result was a constitutional structure that retained the outward form of democratic governance while entirely lacking its substance: a form of constitutional governance that Mazhar, drawing on Walter Benjamin's concept of the state of exception as norm, describes as the permanent exception made constitutional.

The uprising of 2024, in Mazhar's constitutional analysis, was the reassertion of the constituent power against this constitutional structure. It was the people refusing to accept a constitutional framework that claimed to represent their sovereign authority while actually suppressing it, refusing to accept the identification of the formal procedures of constitutional democracy with the genuine exercise of popular sovereignty. The uprising did not merely demand a change of government; it demanded a fundamental transformation of the constitutional framework, a return of the constituent power to the people from whom it had been systematically stolen through a succession of constitutional manipulations.

This analysis has important implications for understanding the political and constitutional situation of Bangladesh in the aftermath of the uprising. If the uprising was a genuine exercise of constituent power, then the political task in its aftermath is not merely to restore the constitutional order that existed before the Fifteenth Amendment or even before the Fifth Amendment; it is to create genuinely new constitutional arrangements that express, for the first time in Bangladesh's history, the authentic constituent power of the people. This is the task that Mazhar's constitutional proposals are designed to address, and it is a task of a fundamentally different order from the restoration of any previous constitutional status quo.

The international constitutional law tradition has developed several frameworks for understanding moments of fundamental constitutional transformation of this kind. The concept of constitutional moment, developed by Bruce Ackerman in his major work *We the People* (1991, 1998, 2014), holds that in American constitutional history, certain extraordinary political moments, in which the political community is mobilized at an unusual level of engagement and intensity, have produced fundamental constitutional transformations that go beyond the formal amendment procedures specified in the constitutional text. These constitutional moments have a higher level of democratic legitimacy than ordinary constitutional amendments because they

express the genuine engaged will of the constitutional people rather than merely the will of the specific institutions empowered to amend the constitution under normal conditions.

Ackerman's framework is directly relevant to Mazhar's analysis of the 2024 uprising as a constituent moment. The uprising was precisely the kind of extraordinary political mobilization that Ackerman's concept of the constitutional moment describes: a moment in which the political community was mobilized at an extraordinary level, in which the political stakes were understood by the participants to be fundamental rather than merely routine, and in which the outcome has the potential to produce a fundamental transformation of the constitutional order. But Ackerman's framework is designed for the American constitutional context, in which the constitutional order has been successfully maintained across multiple constitutional moments, and it does not address the specific challenge that faces a postcolonial society like Bangladesh: the challenge of creating, for the first time, a genuinely legitimate constitutional order from a situation in which no previous constitutional arrangement has successfully expressed the authentic constituent power of the people.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY PROPOSAL: PHILOSOPHY AND DESIGN

The most concrete and the most politically significant element of Mazhar's constitutional proposals is his insistence on the necessity of a genuine constituent assembly as the mechanism through which the constitutional transformation demanded by the 2024 uprising should be accomplished. This proposal has been one of the most controversial of his post-uprising political interventions, generating fierce opposition from those who argue that new elections under the existing constitutional framework are the appropriate next step and equally fierce opposition from those who support more radical constitutional transformation but who doubt the feasibility of a constituent assembly in the specific political conditions of Bangladesh.

Mazhar's case for a genuine constituent assembly rests on three foundational arguments. The first is the argument from constitutional legitimacy: that any new constitutional framework must, to be genuinely legitimate, be the product of a body specifically constituted by the people for the purpose of exercising the constituent power. A new constitution drafted by a parliament elected under the existing constitutional framework would not be the product of a genuine exercise of constituent power; it would be the product of a constituted power that had not received from the people the specific mandate to exercise the constituent function. The legitimacy deficit of the 1972 constitution, which Mazhar's critique identified as one of its foundational weaknesses, would be reproduced in any new constitution drafted through a similar process.

The second argument is the argument from political inclusivity: that a genuine constituent assembly, elected specifically for the purpose of drafting a new constitution, provides the opportunity for a genuinely inclusive deliberative process that a parliamentary process cannot provide. The election of a constituent assembly can be designed to ensure the representation of the full diversity of the Bangladeshi people, including the farming communities, women, religious minorities, indigenous peoples, and other groups that have been systematically

marginalized in the formal political processes of parliamentary democracy. The deliberations of the constituent assembly can be organized to maximize the participation of these marginalized groups and to ensure that their voices genuinely shape the constitutional framework rather than being heard and then ignored.

The third argument is the argument from transformative potential: that the process of drafting a new constitution through a genuine constituent assembly creates the conditions for the kind of political and cultural transformation that genuine constitutional change requires. Constitutional change is not only a matter of changing legal texts; it is a matter of changing the political culture, the forms of political subjectivity, and the understanding of political community that shape how constitutional provisions are interpreted and applied in practice. A genuine constituent assembly process, if it is genuinely inclusive and genuinely deliberative, can itself be an instrument of cultural and political transformation, creating new forms of political engagement, new modes of solidarity, and new understandings of what it means to be a member of a political community.

This third argument connects Mazhar's constituent assembly proposal directly to his broader philosophical framework. The transformation of political culture that he regards as essential for genuine constitutional change is not something that can be produced by the right legal text alone; it requires the cultivation of the forms of political subjectivity, the forms of *bhav* and *rohaniath*, that make genuine democratic participation possible. The process of a genuine constituent assembly deliberation can, if properly organized, serve as an instrument of this cultivation: a process through which the participants develop new forms of political awareness, new capacities for genuine dialogue with those who are different from them, and new understandings of what they share as members of a political community.

The design of a genuine constituent assembly involves a range of complex technical questions that Mazhar has addressed in his constitutional writings: questions about how the assembly should be elected, how its deliberations should be organized, how the participation of marginalized groups should be ensured, how the relationship between the constituent assembly and the existing governmental institutions should be managed during the drafting process, and how the final constitutional document should be ratified by the people. His answers to these questions are informed by the comparative constitutional experience of other countries that have gone through fundamental constitutional transformation processes, including South Africa's constitutional process of the early 1990s, the Icelandic constitutional experiment of 2010 to 2013, the Tunisian process of 2012 to 2014, and the Chilean process of 2021 to 2022.

The South African constitutional process of 1993 to 1996 is the most frequently cited and the most thoroughly studied example of a successful post-authoritarian constitutional transformation, and it provides important lessons for the Bangladeshi situation. The South African process involved a two-stage design: a set of constitutional principles negotiated by the political parties represented in the transitional negotiations, followed by a democratically elected Constitutional Assembly that drafted the final constitutional text within the framework of those negotiated principles. The process combined broad public participation, through public submissions and public hearings, with expert technical assistance, and it achieved a degree of political inclusion and public engagement that is virtually unprecedented in the history of constitution-making.

Mazhar's assessment of the South African model is both appreciative and critical. He appreciates its achievement of genuine political inclusion in the constitutional process and its creation of a constitutional text that embodied a genuine commitment to the transformation of the conditions of the most marginalized members of South African society. But he also identifies important limitations: the negotiations that produced the constitutional principles were primarily negotiations among political party elites rather than a genuine expression of the constituent power, and the dominance of the African National Congress in the Constitutional Assembly meant that the final constitutional text reflected, to a significant degree, the ANC's specific ideological commitments rather than the full diversity of South African political perspectives.

The Icelandic constitutional experiment of 2010 to 2013 provides a different model that Mazhar has found interesting, though also limited. The Icelandic process involved the election of a Constitutional Assembly of twenty-five ordinary citizens, none of whom was a professional politician, who drafted a new constitutional proposal through a genuinely public and participatory process that used social media to invite contributions from the broader Icelandic public. The process was creative and innovative, and it produced a constitutional proposal that enjoyed genuine public support. But it was ultimately blocked by the Icelandic parliament, which refused to submit it to a binding referendum, demonstrating the danger that genuinely democratic constituent processes face when they threaten the interests of the existing political establishment.

This Icelandic experience illuminates one of the central challenges that Mazhar's constituent assembly proposal faces in the Bangladeshi context: the challenge of ensuring that the genuine exercise of constituent power is not captured by or blocked by the existing political establishment. The existing political parties in Bangladesh, including both the Awami League and the BNP, have institutional interests that may be threatened by a genuinely democratic constitutional process, and there is a risk that any constituent assembly process will be co-opted by party political interests before it has the opportunity to express the genuine constituent power of the people.

Mazhar's response to this challenge is to insist on the importance of the design of the constituent assembly process in ensuring its genuine democratic character. The election of the constituent assembly must use electoral methods that maximize proportional representation and ensure the representation of groups that are systematically marginalized by the first-past-the-post electoral system currently used in Bangladesh. The deliberative process of the assembly must be organized to maximize genuine dialogue and minimize the dominance of any single political force. And the ratification of the final constitutional document must be through a direct popular referendum, ensuring that the people themselves, rather than any constituted institution, have the final word on the constitutional framework under which they will live.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES: MAZHAR'S SUBSTANTIVE CONSTITUTIONAL VISION

Beyond the procedural questions of how a new constitution should be made, Mazhar has developed a substantive constitutional vision: a set of principles that he argues should form the

foundation of any constitutional framework that genuinely expresses the constituent power of the Bangladeshi people. These principles are developed most fully in his 2023 book *Gono-ovyutthan o Gathan* and have been elaborated and refined in his subsequent political writings and interviews. They represent the most concrete expression of the relationship between his broader philosophical project and the specific task of constitutional design, and they deserve sustained analysis as both constitutional proposals and philosophical arguments.

The first principle is the principle of popular sovereignty as an ongoing practice rather than a one-time constitutional founding. Mazhar insists that the constituent power of the people is not a power that is exercised once, at the moment of constitutional founding, and then delegated to the constituted institutions for the foreseeable future. It is a power that must be continuously exercised and continuously renewed if it is to remain genuine. This means that the constitutional framework must include mechanisms for the ongoing exercise of constituent power between constitutional moments: mechanisms for constitutional revision, for popular legislative initiative, for recall of elected representatives, and for direct democratic participation in major political decisions. The Swiss model of direct democracy, with its combination of representative institutions and regular popular referenda on specific legislative and constitutional questions, is one of the models that Mazhar regards as pointing in the right direction, though he is aware that any such model must be adapted to the specific conditions of Bangladesh.

This first principle is grounded in Mazhar's philosophical analysis of the relationship between formal democratic procedures and genuine popular sovereignty. The critique of formal democracy as insufficient without genuine popular engagement and genuine popular agency runs throughout his work from his earliest writings to his most recent interventions. A constitutional framework that creates the formal procedures for popular sovereignty without creating the conditions for the genuine exercise of that sovereignty is not expressing the constituent power of the people; it is providing the people with a ritual of sovereignty while the actual exercise of political power remains in the hands of a small elite. The institutional mechanisms for ongoing popular participation are the constitutional expression of the philosophical insistence that genuine sovereignty is not a status to be attributed but a capacity to be exercised.

The second principle is the principle of ecological constitutionalism: the insistence that the constitutional framework must protect the ecological conditions on which all human life and all human political community depend. As we examined in Part Three, Mazhar's ecological philosophy holds that the destruction of the natural environment is not merely an economic or a technical problem but a political and constitutional one, because it destroys the material conditions of the popular sovereignty that the constitution is supposed to protect. A constitution that guarantees the formal rights of citizens while permitting the destruction of the ecological conditions that make the genuine exercise of those rights possible is constitutionally deficient in a fundamental sense.

This ecological constitutional principle goes beyond the conventional environmental provisions that appear in many modern constitutions. The standard form of constitutional environmental protection, exemplified by provisions like Article 21 of the Indian Constitution (as interpreted by the Supreme Court to include the right to a clean environment) or the environmental provisions of the constitutions of Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador, grants citizens the right to a healthy

environment and obliges the state to protect the environment from harm. Mazhar's ecological constitutional principle is more ambitious: it requires not merely that the state refrain from harming the environment but that the constitutional framework actively protect the ecological conditions that sustain life, including the agricultural biodiversity that the Nayakrishi Andolan has identified as essential for the food sovereignty and the climate resilience of the Bangladeshi farming community.

The third principle is the principle of cultural plurality and the equal recognition of the diverse cultural and spiritual traditions of the Bangladeshi people. As we have examined in both Part Two and Part Four, Mazhar's engagement with Bengali cultural identity is grounded in the insistence that the actual cultural heritage of Bangladesh is much more diverse and much more philosophically rich than the dominant cultural nationalist tradition acknowledges, and that a constitutional framework that recognizes only the secular Bengali nationalist cultural tradition while marginalizing the Islamic spiritual heritage, the indigenous cultural traditions, and the syncretic folk traditions of the delta is not a genuine expression of the constituent power of the diverse people who inhabit Bangladesh.

This principle of cultural plurality is not the standard liberal principle of cultural neutrality, the idea that the state should be neutral between the competing cultural traditions of its citizens and should not favour any of them in its constitutional framework. Mazhar's principle goes further: it requires positive constitutional recognition and protection of the diverse cultural traditions that constitute the actual cultural heritage of the Bangladeshi people, including the Islamic spiritual tradition, the Baul and Fakiri tradition, the indigenous cultural traditions of the hill tracts and the northern plains, and the Hindu cultural traditions of the religious minority communities. The philosophical foundation of this positive pluralism is the relational ontology that Mazhar has developed throughout his intellectual career: the understanding that the political community is constituted not by the convergence of a homogeneous cultural identity but by the ongoing negotiation of diverse and irreducible cultural perspectives.

The fourth principle is the principle of the decentralization of political power and the recognition of the political autonomy of local communities. Mazhar's constitutional theory is explicitly hostile to the centralization of power that has characterized all of Bangladesh's constitutional arrangements, a centralization that concentrates decision-making authority in the national capital and leaves local communities with minimal meaningful control over the conditions of their own lives. The philosophical foundation of this anti-centralization principle is his concept of genuine popular sovereignty, which holds that sovereignty is not meaningfully exercised by communities who have no effective control over the decisions that most directly affect their lives.

The specific form of decentralization that Mazhar advocates is not merely the administrative decentralization that has been the typical form of devolution in Bangladesh, in which central government programs are administered through local government bodies but the substantive policy decisions remain centrally determined. It is a political decentralization that gives local communities genuine authority over the decisions that most directly affect them: decisions about agricultural policy and land use, about the management of local water resources and ecological commons, about local economic development, and about the cultural and educational policies that shape the self-understanding of the local community.

This principle of political decentralization is directly connected to Mazhar's ecological philosophy and to the constitutional implications of the Nayakrishi Andolan's work. The management of agricultural commons, the maintenance of seed biodiversity, the protection of the ecological conditions of the delta landscape: all of these require decision-making authority to be located at the level of the local community, where the knowledge and the relationships necessary for genuine ecological stewardship are concentrated. A centralized constitutional framework that reserves these decisions for national-level bureaucracies and technocratic institutions is not only politically unjust, in that it deprives local communities of meaningful self-determination; it is also ecologically irrational, in that it substitutes the abstract, universalizing knowledge of the technocratic state for the contextual, relational knowledge of the farming communities who are the actual stewards of the local ecological conditions.

The fifth principle is the principle of the genuine protection of economic and social rights as rights enforceable through the constitutional order rather than merely as directive principles of state policy. The 1972 constitution, like many constitutions of its era, included provisions on economic and social rights, including the right to work, the right to food, the right to education, and the right to health, but placed them in Part II of the constitution as fundamental principles of state policy rather than as justiciable rights enforceable in the courts. This two-tier structure of rights, which places civil and political rights in the enforceable first tier while relegating economic and social rights to the non-enforceable second tier, reflects the liberal constitutional theory of the era and its assumption that the state has direct obligations with respect to civil and political rights but can only have programmatic obligations with respect to economic and social rights.

Mazhar's constitutional philosophy rejects this two-tier structure of rights on both philosophical and empirical grounds. Philosophically, the distinction between enforceable civil and political rights and non-enforceable economic and social rights is grounded in the liberal assumption that civil and political rights are negative rights, rights against state interference, while economic and social rights are positive rights, rights to specific goods or services that the state must provide. This distinction is philosophically untenable: civil and political rights are themselves resource-intensive, requiring extensive institutional infrastructure for their implementation, while many economic and social rights can be understood as negative rights, rights against the state's active destruction of people's capabilities for work, education, and health. Empirically, the relegation of economic and social rights to the non-enforceable tier has meant that the constitutional framework has failed to protect the most fundamental conditions of human dignity and political agency for the majority of the Bangladeshi population, while providing robust formal protection for the civil and political rights that are most relevant to the educated urban elite.

The sixth principle is the principle of the accountability of the political establishment to the constituent power, expressed through both institutional mechanisms of accountability and through the recognition of the right of the people to resist and ultimately to overthrow constitutional arrangements that have failed to express their genuine constituent authority. This principle of constitutional resistance is the most philosophically radical element of Mazhar's constitutional proposals, and it is the element that has generated the most political controversy. The conventional constitutional tradition is deeply suspicious of any recognition of a right of resistance, because such recognition seems to open the door to the legitimation of any extra-

constitutional political action by any group that claims to be exercising constituent power on behalf of the people.

Mazhar's response to this concern is to ground the right of constitutional resistance not in the judgment of any specific political actor or group but in the objective conditions of constitutional failure: the conditions in which the formal procedures of constitutional democracy have been systematically hollowed out, in which the formal guarantees of fundamental rights are being routinely violated, and in which the constituted institutions have ceased to function as expressions of the constituent power and have instead become instruments of its suppression. The 2024 uprising, in his analysis, was precisely the exercise of this right of constitutional resistance: a collective assertion by the Bangladeshi people that the constitutional order had failed them and that they were exercising their constituent authority to demand its fundamental transformation.

The seventh principle is the principle of the equal dignity and equal political agency of all members of the constituent people, including and especially those who have been most systematically marginalized by the existing constitutional and political framework: women, religious minorities, indigenous peoples, farming communities, and the urban poor. This principle is not merely a restatement of the standard liberal principle of equality before the law. It is a substantive principle that requires the constitutional framework to actively work to dismantle the structures of exclusion and marginalization that prevent the full exercise of constituent power by all members of the political community. In terms of constitutional design, this principle demands not merely formal non-discrimination but positive constitutional obligations of affirmative inclusion: obligations of the state and of the constituted institutions to take active measures to ensure the genuine political participation of the marginalized.

CHAPTER SIX: POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY AND ITS PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS: THE BENGALI DIMENSION

The philosophical foundation of Mazhar's concept of popular sovereignty is not solely derived from the Western political philosophical tradition, however important his engagement with that tradition has been in developing and articulating his constitutional theory. It is also deeply rooted in the Bengali philosophical tradition and in the specific understanding of human community and human dignity that the Lalon tradition and the broader tradition of the Bengal delta have generated. This Bengali philosophical foundation of his constitutional theory is, in some respects, the most original and the most philosophically significant dimension of his constitutional thought, because it introduces resources for thinking about popular sovereignty and political community that the Western constitutional tradition has not developed and cannot easily generate from within its own resources.

The concept of janaganer mojizat, the miracle of the people, which Mazhar uses in his 2023 book to describe the transformative political potential of genuine popular mobilization, is an example of this Bengali philosophical dimension. The word mojizat, borrowed from the Arabic mu`jizah, meaning miracle or supernatural act, refers in Islamic theological usage to the miracles

performed by the prophets as signs of their divine authorization. Mazhar's secular application of this concept to the political sphere, describing the self-transformative capacity of the people as a form of miracle, is a characteristic instance of his method: the philosophical translation of spiritual concepts into political ones, the insistence that the spiritual and the political are not separate domains but different expressions of the same fundamental human capacity for transcending the given conditions of existence.

The Bengali philosophical tradition's contribution to constitutional theory operates primarily through the concept of samajer mul, the root of society, which Mazhar has developed as a constitutional category. The samajer mul is not the state; it is the deep social fabric constituted by the relationships of solidarity, mutual care, and shared practice through which communities sustain themselves across time. The state, and the constitutional framework that organizes the state, derives its legitimacy from the samajer mul and must be accountable to it; when the state violates the samajer mul, when it destroys the relationships of solidarity and mutual care through which the community sustains itself, it loses its legitimacy and the community has both the right and the obligation to reconstitute it.

This concept of the samajer mul as the ultimate foundation of constitutional legitimacy is philosophically distinct from the Western concept of the constituent people as the ultimate foundation of constitutional authority. The Western tradition, from Sieyes through the subsequent development of constitutional theory, understands the constituent people primarily as a political subject: a collective agent that exercises political will in the moment of constitutional founding and whose authority grounds the constitutional framework thereafter. Mazhar's concept of the samajer mul understands the foundation of constitutional legitimacy in more ecological and more relational terms: not as the political will of a collective subject but as the living fabric of relationships, practices, and forms of mutual care through which a community constitutes and sustains itself.

This distinction has important implications for constitutional design. If the foundation of constitutional legitimacy is the political will of the constituent people, then the primary task of constitutional design is to create mechanisms through which that will can be expressed and through which it can be translated into constitutional provisions and institutional arrangements. But if the foundation of constitutional legitimacy is the living fabric of social relationships through which a community sustains itself, then the primary task of constitutional design is to create a constitutional framework that protects and nourishes that fabric, that prevents the state and the market from destroying the relationships of solidarity and mutual care through which the community sustains itself, and that creates conditions for the ongoing renewal and development of those relationships.

The practical implications of this different understanding of constitutional foundations are significant. A constitutional framework grounded in the concept of the samajer mul would give constitutional protection not only to formal political rights but to the social conditions, the commons, the ecologies of relationship, the cultural practices and the spiritual traditions, through which the community sustains its fabric of mutual care. It would recognize the destruction of these conditions, whether through the economic policies of the state, the enclosure of the agricultural commons by commercial interests, or the cultural impositions of a dominant

tradition, as constitutional violations comparable to the violation of formal political rights. And it would understand constitutional legitimacy not primarily as a matter of the formal procedures through which the constitutional text was adopted but as a matter of the degree to which the constitutional framework actually protects and nourishes the living fabric of social relationships through which the community sustains itself.

This understanding of constitutional legitimacy converges, from a very different direction, with the tradition of indigenous constitutionalism that has developed in Latin America and in some other postcolonial contexts. The constitutionalism of the Andean countries, expressed most fully in the Bolivian and Ecuadorian constitutions that recognize the rights of Pachamama and the collective rights of indigenous nations, is grounded in an understanding of the political community as embedded in a web of relationships that extends beyond the human to include the natural world and the ancestors, and that cannot be reduced to the formal political will of a collection of individual citizens. This indigenous constitutionalism shares with Mazhar's concept of the *samajer mul* a relational and ecological understanding of the foundations of political community that challenges the atomistic individualism of the liberal constitutional tradition.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE JURISPRUDENCE OF REVOLUTION AND THE THEORY OF LEGITIMATE RESISTANCE

The jurisprudence of revolution, the question of how legal theory should understand and evaluate the moments of fundamental political transformation that occur outside the established constitutional order, is one of the most challenging and least settled areas of constitutional theory. Mazhar's engagement with this question, developed in the context of his analysis of the 2024 uprising and its constitutional implications, represents one of the most philosophically sophisticated treatments of these questions in the contemporary constitutional literature.

The classical tradition of legal positivism, associated with theorists like John Austin and Hans Kelsen, would have great difficulty accommodating Mazhar's analysis of the 2024 uprising as a legitimate exercise of constituent power. For the positivist tradition, legal validity derives from formal pedigree: a legal norm is valid if it has been enacted through the procedures specified by the valid norms of the existing legal system. A political transformation that occurs outside those procedures, however popular or however justified in moral terms, is from the positivist perspective extra-legal: it may produce a new legal system, but it does so by stepping outside the existing legal system rather than through its procedures.

Mazhar's constitutional philosophy is explicitly non-positivist in its approach to this question. He draws instead on the tradition of natural law theory and on the political philosophical tradition of legitimate resistance to argue that there are standards of constitutional legitimacy that are independent of and prior to the formal procedures of any specific legal system, and that a constitutional order that systematically violates these standards loses its claim to the obedience of the people and thereby creates the conditions for the legitimate exercise of constituent power to transform or replace it.

The natural law tradition in Western political philosophy, running from Aristotle through Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, and the Enlightenment political philosophers to the contemporary neo-natural law theory of John Finnis and Joseph Raz, holds that the validity of law depends not only on its formal pedigree but on its consistency with certain fundamental moral and political principles: principles of justice, of human dignity, and of the common good that are accessible to human reason independently of any specific legal system. A law that violates these fundamental principles is not a genuine law but a corruption of law, and it does not generate the same obligation of obedience as genuine law.

Mazhar's version of this tradition is grounded not in the natural law tradition of Western scholasticism but in the Islamic philosophical tradition of *maqasid al-sharia* and in the Bengali philosophical tradition's concept of *dharma*, understood not as caste duty in the Hindu traditionalist sense but as the fundamental principle of right relationship between the human being and the world, between the individual and the community, and between the community and the divine ground of existence. A constitutional order that systematically violates the *maqasid*, that destroys rather than protects the conditions of life, reason, family, property, and spiritual practice that constitute human flourishing, and that violates the *dharma* of right relationship by concentrating power in a small elite at the expense of the community's welfare, has forfeited its claim to constitutional legitimacy.

The jurisprudential implications of this analysis are significant. If constitutional legitimacy depends on the constitutional order's actual service of the conditions of human flourishing rather than on its formal pedigree, then the question of whether any specific constitutional arrangement is legitimate is always an open question, not definitively settled by the fact of its formal adoption. This does not mean that any political actor can at any time claim to be exercising constituent power on behalf of the people; such a claim requires substantive conditions to be met, conditions relating to the breadth and the depth of the political mobilization, to the specific character of the constitutional violation that is being resisted, and to the genuine democratic character of the alternative being proposed. But it does mean that the formal validity of a constitutional arrangement does not, by itself, exhaust the question of its legitimacy.

The theory of constitutional moments and the recognition of extra-constitutional founding moments as legitimate exercises of constituent power has been developed, in the context of Western constitutional history, by theorists like Ackerman, as we noted earlier, and also by the legal historians of revolutionary constitutional moments like the American revolution, the French revolution, and the various democratic revolutions of the twentieth century. In each of these cases, the revolutionary founding moment was extra-legal by the standards of the constitutional order it replaced: the American Declaration of Independence was a violation of the law of the British Crown, and the French revolutionary constituent assembly was a violation of the legal framework of the *Ancien Regime*. But these extra-legal moments are retrospectively recognized as legitimate exercises of constituent power precisely because they resulted in constitutional orders that more adequately expressed the genuine democratic will of the political community.

The question of whether the 2024 Bangladesh uprising will be retrospectively recognized as a legitimate exercise of constituent power depends, in Mazhar's analysis, on whether it succeeds in producing a constitutional transformation that genuinely expresses the will and the aspirations of

the Bangladeshi people, rather than being captured by one or another of the existing political elite formations and resulting in a new constitutional arrangement that is as inadequate to the genuine expression of popular sovereignty as the one it replaced. This is the political challenge that Mazhar's constitutional proposals are designed to address, and it is the challenge that the ongoing political situation in Bangladesh, as of early 2026, has not yet successfully met.

CHAPTER EIGHT: THE THEORY OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND ITS FAILURES

One of the most systematic dimensions of Mazhar's constitutional theory is his analysis of political representation and its systemic failures in the Bangladesh context. Political representation, the mechanism through which the constituent power of the people is expressed through elected representatives in legislative and executive institutions, is the central institution of modern constitutional democracy, and its adequate functioning is essential for any genuine expression of popular sovereignty within the framework of constituted institutions. Mazhar's analysis of how political representation has failed in Bangladesh is one of the most important contributions of his constitutional theory to the understanding of the specific pathologies of postcolonial democratic governance.

The standard analysis of the failure of political representation in Bangladesh focuses on the specific institutional failures: electoral fraud, voter intimidation, the use of state resources for electoral advantage, the dominance of money and muscle in electoral politics, and the systematic subordination of the formal procedures of democratic representation to the informal realities of political patronage and clientelism. All of these failures are real and important, and Mazhar's analysis engages with all of them. But his more fundamental analysis goes beyond these institutional failures to identify the structural conditions that produce them: the conditions inherent in the specific form of parliamentary representation that Bangladesh has adopted and in the specific social and economic context in which that form of representation operates.

The structural critique centers on what Mazhar calls the mediation problem: the problem that in the specific conditions of Bangladesh, the formal institutions of political representation are not genuine mediators between the constituent power of the people and the exercise of political authority but are instead mechanisms through which the existing power structures of the society, economic, cultural, and political, reproduce themselves through the formal procedures of democratic election. The politician who is elected to represent a constituency is not, in the actual conditions of Bangladeshi politics, chosen by the voters as the person best able to articulate and advance their interests; she is typically chosen through a process in which the dominant power structures of the constituency, including the landlords, the local business interests, the party machines, and the religious establishments, exercise decisive influence on both the selection of candidates and the outcome of the vote.

This analysis draws on the tradition of political sociology associated with figures like Robert Dahl, Giovanni Sartori, and more recently Colin Crouch, whose concept of post-democracy describes the condition of contemporary democratic politics in which the formal procedures of

democratic governance are maintained while the actual exercise of political power is increasingly insulated from genuine popular influence. In the post-democratic condition, elections remain regular and formally competitive, but the real decisions about policy and governance are made in negotiations between governments and powerful private interests that take place largely outside the framework of formal democratic politics.

Mazhar's analysis extends this concept of post-democracy to the specific conditions of postcolonial Bangladesh, where the structural dynamics that produce post-democratic outcomes operate through a combination of colonial inheritance, the specific political economy of aid-dependent development, and the particular social structures of the delta landscape. The colonial inheritance includes the administrative apparatus of the colonial state, designed to govern a subject people rather than to serve a sovereign people, and the specific forms of social hierarchy, particularly the hierarchy between the educated urban elite and the rural majority, that colonialism both inherited from the pre-colonial order and transformed in its own image. The political economy of aid-dependent development has created a set of incentive structures in which political success depends more on access to the networks through which development aid is channeled than on genuine responsiveness to the political preferences of the electorate. And the social structures of the delta landscape, particularly the patterns of agricultural tenancy, indebtedness, and dependence on patron-client relationships that characterize the economic conditions of the rural majority, create conditions in which the formal freedom of the vote is exercised under conditions of social constraint that make genuine democratic choice extremely difficult.

The solution to the mediation problem, in Mazhar's constitutional theory, is not primarily a technical one: not the design of better electoral systems or stronger anti-corruption institutions, though these have their value. It is a political and cultural solution: the cultivation of the forms of political consciousness, political agency, and political solidarity through which the people develop the capacity to exercise genuine constituent power rather than merely participating in the ritual of electoral choice without genuine influence over the political outcomes that shape their lives.

This political and cultural solution connects the constitutional theory directly to the broader philosophical project of cultivating roohaniath, spiritual awareness, and bhav, the relational engagement with the world, that runs throughout Mazhar's intellectual career. The cultivation of genuine political consciousness is not separate from the cultivation of genuine spiritual awareness; they are both expressions of the same fundamental human capacity for transcending the given conditions of existence and engaging with the world from the fullness of what Lalou's tradition calls the Moner Manush.

CHAPTER NINE: CONSTITUTIONAL THEORY AND POLITICAL ECONOMY: THE MISSING LINK

One of the most important and most systematically developed dimensions of Mazhar's constitutional theory is his insistence on the connection between constitutional theory and

political economy: his argument that the formal constitutional framework of rights and institutions cannot be adequately understood or adequately reformed in isolation from the political economy that shapes the material conditions in which those formal provisions operate. This insistence distinguishes his constitutional theory from the mainstream of constitutional scholarship, which tends to treat constitutional law as a relatively autonomous domain of legal theory and practice, and connects it to the traditions of political economy, Marxist and non-Marxist, that have analyzed the relationship between economic structures and political forms.

The connection between the constitutional framework and the political economy of Bangladesh, in Mazhar's analysis, operates through several distinct mechanisms. The first is the mechanism of constitutional capture: the process through which economically powerful interests use their economic power to shape the constitutional framework and the constituted institutions in ways that protect and advance their economic interests. In the Bangladeshi context, this mechanism has operated through the concentration of ownership of major media outlets in the hands of business interests closely connected to the major political parties, the use of campaign finance to ensure the responsiveness of elected officials to their major donors, the appointment of individuals with close ties to the business community to regulatory bodies and other state institutions, and the use of state economic policy to reward political supporters and punish political opponents.

The second mechanism is the mechanism of economic conditioning: the process through which the economic conditions of the majority of the population systematically undermine the formal political rights that the constitutional framework guarantees. As Mazhar has argued throughout his constitutional writings, the formal right to vote, to organize politically, and to express political views freely is of limited value to someone who is economically dependent on a landlord, employer, or patron who has the power to punish the exercise of these rights through economic retaliation. The economic dependency of the rural poor and of many urban workers on those who control land, capital, and employment creates conditions in which the formal freedoms of the constitutional order are systematically conditioned by economic power in ways that the constitutional framework does not acknowledge and does not address.

The third mechanism is the mechanism of ideological reproduction: the process through which the constitutional framework itself, through its formal provisions and through the specific understanding of political rights that it embodies and normalizes, reproduces the ideological assumptions of the dominant economic interests. The standard constitutional framework of individual rights and representative democracy is, in Mazhar's analysis, not a neutral framework for organizing political life; it is a framework that embodies specific assumptions about the nature of the political subject, the proper relationship between the individual and the community, and the appropriate scope of state intervention in economic life that reflect the specific political economy of liberal capitalism and that systematically privilege the interests and the perspectives of those who are embedded in that political economy over the interests and the perspectives of those who are excluded from or marginalized by it.

This analysis draws on the tradition of critical legal studies and its feminist and postcolonial variants, including the work of Duncan Kennedy, Roberto Unger, Kimberle Crenshaw, and Upendra Baxi, which has argued that law is not a neutral set of rules and principles but is itself a

site of political contestation that reflects and reproduces specific power structures. The critical legal tradition's analysis of the ways in which apparently neutral legal principles serve specific political interests, and of the ways in which the formal equality of legal rules coexists with the substantive inequality of social conditions, is directly relevant to Mazhar's critique of the Bangladeshi constitutional framework and to his proposals for its transformation.

The most important practical implication of Mazhar's analysis of the connection between constitutional theory and political economy is his insistence that genuine constitutional reform must be accompanied by fundamental economic reform. A new constitutional framework that does not address the economic structures through which the existing constitutional order has been captured and hollowed out will not produce genuine popular sovereignty, however sophisticated its formal institutional design. The protection of economic and social rights as justiciable constitutional rights, the protection of the agricultural commons and the ecological conditions on which the rural majority depends, the democratic governance of economic policy, and the specific protections for farming communities' rights to their seeds and their lands that Mazhar's ecological philosophy demands: all of these are as much constitutional as they are economic reforms, because they address the economic conditions that determine whether the formal constitutional provisions of popular sovereignty are genuine expressions of the constituent power or merely its simulacrum.

CHAPTER TEN: THE NATIONAL CHARTER DEBATE AND MAZHAR'S INTERVENTION

The post-uprising political situation in Bangladesh, from August 2024 onward, has been dominated by a complex and contested debate about the form that constitutional transformation should take. The interim government led by Muhammad Yunus, which came to power following the fall of the Hasina government, initiated a process of consultation with political parties and civil society organizations about the nature and the scope of constitutional reform. Various reform proposals have been put forward by different political actors: proposals for the restoration of the 1972 constitution in its original form, proposals for a modified constitution that retains the basic framework of the 1972 document while making specific amendments to address specific failures, and proposals for a more fundamental constitutional transformation through a constituent assembly or a national charter process.

Mazhar's interventions in this debate have been characteristically radical and characteristically controversial. His insistence that only a constituent assembly or a direct popular referendum can produce a genuinely legitimate constitutional transformation has put him at odds both with those who favour working within the existing constitutional framework and with those who support a new constitution drafted by a parliamentary committee rather than a specifically constituted constituent body.

His statement, reported by TBS News, that "only a constituent assembly or referendum can validate a national charter," is the clearest expression of his constitutional position in the post-uprising context. The argument is both procedural and substantive: procedural in that it insists on

the specific democratic authorization that the exercise of constituent power requires, and substantive in that it insists that any constitutional transformation must be genuinely expressive of the full diversity of the Bangladeshi people rather than the product of a process dominated by the existing political establishment.

The political parties' response to Mazhar's constituent assembly proposal has been mixed and, in the case of the larger parties, predominantly negative. The BNP, the largest opposition party, has consistently pressed for early elections under a reformed version of the existing constitutional framework, arguing that a constituent assembly process would take too long and would delay the restoration of elected civilian government. The various smaller parties and the student movement organizations that led the uprising have been more sympathetic to the constituent assembly proposal, but they have also been divided about its specific form and about the relationship between a constituent assembly process and other reform demands.

Mazhar's analysis of the political resistance to his constituent assembly proposal is characteristically structural rather than merely tactical. The resistance of the established political parties to a genuine constituent assembly process is not, in his analysis, merely a tactical preference for the political arrangements most favourable to their partisan interests, though it is certainly that too. It is a structural resistance grounded in the fact that the established political parties are themselves products of and stakeholders in the existing constitutional order, and that a genuine constituent assembly process would necessarily challenge the monopoly on political representation that they currently enjoy.

This structural analysis is directly relevant to the practical challenge of achieving genuine constitutional transformation in the post-uprising context. The challenge is not merely to design the right constitutional provisions but to create the political conditions in which genuine constitutional transformation is possible: conditions in which the constituent power of the people can be exercised in a way that is not immediately captured by the existing political establishment. Mazhar's proposals for how this challenge might be met draw on his broader analysis of the conditions of genuine popular sovereignty: the cultivation of the forms of political consciousness and political solidarity through which the people develop the capacity to exercise genuine constituent power rather than merely participating in the rituals of formal democracy.

The concept of *nahj*, the path or the method, which Mazhar borrows from the Islamic philosophical tradition to describe the process of developing the conditions for genuine constitutional transformation, is relevant here. Just as the spiritual path requires a specific discipline and a specific set of practices for the cultivation of genuine spiritual awareness, the political path toward genuine constituent power requires a specific discipline and a specific set of practices for the cultivation of genuine political consciousness: practices of community organizing, of democratic deliberation, of the development of shared political vision among the diverse communities that constitute the Bangladeshi people. The political task of the post-uprising moment is not primarily to draft the right constitutional document but to develop the practices and the forms of solidarity through which the constituent power can be genuinely expressed.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: THE DOCTRINE OF BASIC STRUCTURE AND ITS BANGLADESHI DEVELOPMENT

The doctrine of basic structure, which holds that certain fundamental features of the constitutional order cannot be amended even through the formal amendment procedures specified in the constitution, has had an important and contested history in Bangladesh that is directly relevant to Mazhar's constitutional analysis. The doctrine was first recognized in the Bangladeshi context in the case of *Anwar Hossain Chowdhury vs. Bangladesh*, decided by the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court in 1989, which struck down the Eighth Amendment to the constitution on the grounds that it violated the basic structure of the constitutional order by transferring the appellate jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to permanent benches in different parts of the country.

The Bangladeshi Supreme Court's recognition of the basic structure doctrine in 1989 was a significant constitutional development, and it has been subsequently relied upon in various cases to evaluate the constitutional validity of specific amendments. But Mazhar's analysis of the basic structure doctrine in the Bangladeshi context is critical and nuanced. He acknowledges the significance of the doctrine as a constitutional safeguard against the most extreme forms of constitutional manipulation, but he also identifies its limitations as a mechanism for genuinely protecting the constituent power of the people.

The primary limitation is the institutional one: the basic structure doctrine relies on the Supreme Court as its enforcer, and the Supreme Court is itself an institution of the constituted order whose composition and whose effective independence from political pressure are shaped by the same political dynamics that the doctrine is supposed to restrain. A Supreme Court whose composition is controlled by the incumbent government, either through the appointment power or through more informal means of influence, cannot be relied upon to enforce the basic structure doctrine against the very government that controls its composition. The pattern of the Bangladeshi Supreme Court's behaviour under the Hasina government, in which the court frequently declined to challenge constitutional actions by the government that previous courts had treated as constitutionally problematic, illustrates this limitation with particular clarity.

The deeper limitation is philosophical: the basic structure doctrine, as it has been developed in the Bangladeshi and Indian jurisprudence, identifies the basic structure of the constitutional order with specific institutional arrangements, particularly with the separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary, and the democratic character of the constitutional order, rather than with the foundational values of justice, human dignity, and genuine popular sovereignty from which those institutional arrangements are supposed to derive. This identification of the basic structure with specific institutional forms rather than with foundational values means that the doctrine can protect the formal procedures of constitutional democracy while remaining indifferent to the hollowing out of those procedures through which genuine popular sovereignty is suppressed.

Mazhar's alternative to the basic structure doctrine's institutional approach is what he calls the living constituent power standard: the standard that constitutional provisions and constitutional amendments must be evaluated not merely by reference to their formal consistency with the

institutional framework of the existing constitutional order but by reference to their contribution to or their suppression of the genuine exercise of constituent power by the people. This standard is more demanding than the basic structure doctrine because it requires courts and other constitutional actors to evaluate constitutional arrangements in terms of their substantive democratic legitimacy, their actual contribution to the genuine self-determination of the political community, rather than merely in terms of their formal compliance with established constitutional procedures.

This standard is also more controversial than the basic structure doctrine because it requires constitutional actors to make substantive political and philosophical judgments about what genuine popular sovereignty requires, and those judgments inevitably reflect specific political and philosophical commitments that different members of the political community may not share. Mazhar is aware of this difficulty, and his response to it is consistent with his broader constitutional philosophy: the resolution of these disagreements about the substantive requirements of genuine popular sovereignty must ultimately be the work of the constituent power itself, expressed through the processes of democratic deliberation and collective political action through which the political community constitutes and reconstitutes its understanding of itself.

CHAPTER TWELVE: COMPARATIVE CONSTITUTIONALISM AND THE POSTCOLONIAL CONDITION

The development of Mazhar's constitutional theory must be understood in the context of the broader tradition of postcolonial constitutionalism, which has developed over the past several decades as a distinctive field within comparative constitutional law and political theory. Postcolonial constitutionalism addresses the specific challenges that former colonial states face in developing genuinely democratic constitutional orders: challenges that arise from the colonial inheritance, from the specific social structures and political dynamics of postcolonial societies, and from the continuing influence of the former colonial powers and of the international institutions that they dominate on the constitutional choices of newly independent states.

The postcolonial constitutional tradition, associated with scholars like Upendra Baxi, Rajeev Dhavan, Ran Hirschl, and more recently the scholars associated with the Global Constitutionalism project and the critical constitutional studies movement in various postcolonial contexts, has identified a set of characteristic pathologies of postcolonial constitutionalism that are directly relevant to Mazhar's analysis of the Bangladeshi constitutional experience. These pathologies include: the elite capture of the constitutional process, in which the educated urban minority that dominated the independence movement uses the constitution to entrench its own power while formally claiming to speak for the people as a whole; the mimicry of Western constitutional forms, in which the constitutional documents adopt the formal structures of European and American constitutional law without the social and political conditions that give those structures their democratic content; and the instrumentalization of the constitution, in which the constitutional framework is treated not as a genuine expression of popular sovereignty but as a tool for the management of political competition among elites.

All three of these pathologies are visible in Mazhar's analysis of the Bangladeshi constitutional experience. The elite capture of the 1972 constitutional process, the mimicry of the Westminster parliamentary model and its subsequent transformation through successive constitutional amendments, and the systematic instrumentalization of the constitutional framework by successive governments to serve their partisan interests, are the central themes of his constitutional critique. His constitutional proposals are, in essence, an attempt to overcome all three pathologies simultaneously: to create a constitutional process that genuinely expresses the constituent power of the full diversity of the Bangladeshi people rather than the preferences of the educated urban elite; to develop constitutional forms that are genuinely adequate to the specific conditions and the specific values of Bangladeshi society rather than mere imitations of Western constitutional models; and to create a constitutional framework that functions as a genuine expression of popular sovereignty rather than as a tool for elite political management.

The comparison with the Sri Lankan constitutional experience is particularly instructive in the Bangladeshi context. Sri Lanka, like Bangladesh, is a postcolonial South Asian democracy that has struggled throughout its constitutional history with the tensions between different ethnic, linguistic, and religious communities, and that has experienced periods of profound constitutional crisis, including the long civil war between the Sinhalese-dominated state and the Tamil minority that concluded in 2009. The Sri Lankan constitutional experience illustrates, with particular clarity, the dangers of constitutional frameworks that fail to genuinely accommodate the diversity of the political community: a constitution that serves the interests of the majority community at the expense of the minority creates the conditions for the political mobilization of the minority in extra-constitutional ways, and ultimately for the kind of violent conflict that the constitutional framework was supposed to prevent.

Mazhar has drawn on the Sri Lankan constitutional experience in his analysis of the specific risks that the Bangladeshi constitutional situation faces. The danger that the post-uprising moment in Bangladesh might produce a new constitutional framework that serves the interests of one or another majority community, whether defined in terms of Bengali cultural nationalism, Islamic religious identity, or any other dimension of collective identity, at the expense of the minority communities, is a danger that his constitutional proposals are specifically designed to address through the principle of cultural plurality and equal recognition. But he also recognizes that the institutional mechanisms for protecting minority rights are insufficient on their own; they must be accompanied by the cultivation of the political culture of solidarity and mutual recognition that alone can give those institutional mechanisms genuine democratic content.

The comparison with the Kenyan constitutional experience of 2010, when Kenya adopted a new constitution through a process of broad public participation and popular ratification, is also relevant. The Kenyan constitutional process of 2005 to 2010, which involved an extensive public participation process, the drafting of a new constitution by a specially constituted Committee of Experts, and the ratification of the final document through a popular referendum, is widely regarded as one of the more successful examples of participatory constitution-making in the postcolonial African context. The Kenyan constitution of 2010 introduced several innovative constitutional features, including a devolved system of county governments that gives significant political autonomy to local communities, and a strong bill of rights that includes economic and social rights.

Mazhar's assessment of the Kenyan model is, characteristically, both appreciative and critical. He appreciates the genuine public participation that characterized the Kenyan constitutional process and the substantive innovation of the devolution model, which addresses the mediation problem by creating meaningful political autonomy at the local level. But he also sees limitations: the Kenyan constitution's economic provisions, while innovative in their recognition of economic and social rights, do not go far enough in addressing the structural economic conditions that undermine the genuine exercise of those rights, and the devolution model has been partly undermined by the continuing dominance of political patronage networks at the county level.

The most important comparative reference point for Mazhar's constitutional proposals is, perhaps, the contemporary Latin American tradition of transformative constitutionalism. The constitutions of Venezuela (1999), Ecuador (2008), and Bolivia (2009), all adopted through processes involving broad popular participation and all embodying ambitious programmes of social and economic transformation, represent the most radical contemporary experiments in transformative constitutionalism. These constitutions have attracted enormous attention from scholars and political actors across the postcolonial world, and they have been both celebrated as models of genuine democratic transformation and criticized as instruments of populist authoritarianism.

Mazhar's engagement with the Latin American transformative constitutional tradition is more nuanced than either its celebrants or its critics. He sees in the Latin American constitutions genuine attempts to address the structural economic conditions that undermine formal constitutional rights, and he finds their recognition of the rights of nature and of indigenous communities philosophically important and potentially instructive for the Bangladeshi context. But he also recognizes the risks that these constitutional experiments have faced: the tendency toward the concentration of power in the executive that has characterized several of the left-populist governments that have operated under these constitutions, and the difficulty of sustaining genuinely popular constitutional governance in the face of elite resistance, both domestic and international.

The lesson that Mazhar draws from the Latin American experience is consistent with the broader argument of his constitutional theory: that transformative constitutional change requires not only the right institutional design but the cultivation of the forms of political consciousness and political solidarity through which the constituent power can sustain its exercise of democratic self-determination against the forces that always seek to capture or to undermine it.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: THE DIGITAL SECURITY ACT, PRESS FREEDOM, AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL DIMENSIONS OF INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

The suppression of intellectual freedom and press freedom in Bangladesh through the Digital Security Act of 2018 and its successor, the Cyber Security Act of 2023, is one of the most specific and most politically urgent constitutional issues on which Mazhar has taken sustained and outspoken positions. His engagement with this issue connects his constitutional theory

directly to his personal experience as a writer and intellectual who has been persecuted for his expression, and it illustrates with particular vividness the relationship between the formal constitutional guarantees of fundamental rights and the political mechanisms through which those guarantees are systematically undermined in practice.

The Digital Security Act of 2018 was one of the most sweeping restrictions on freedom of expression ever enacted in Bangladesh. Its provisions criminalized the publication of material that the government deemed to be "false, obscene, or defamatory" in digital media, with penalties of up to fourteen years' imprisonment, and they were applied in practice primarily against journalists, bloggers, activists, and ordinary citizens who criticized the government or published information embarrassing to the ruling party. The international human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Committee to Protect Journalists, documented hundreds of cases of arbitrary detention and prosecution under the Act, and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression identified it as fundamentally incompatible with Bangladesh's international human rights obligations.

Mazhar's constitutional analysis of the Digital Security Act focuses on its relationship to the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression in Article 39 of the Bangladesh Constitution. Article 39 guarantees freedom of thought and conscience and freedom of speech and expression, subject to restrictions imposed by law in the interests of the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation, or incitement to an offence. The Digital Security Act's provisions, Mazhar argues, go far beyond the permissible restrictions that Article 39 authorizes, because they criminalize expression that is not harmful in any of the ways that the constitutional provision contemplates; they criminalize expression that is politically embarrassing to the government.

This is not merely a technical constitutional argument; it is a philosophical argument about the relationship between the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression and the fundamental conditions of genuine political democracy. Freedom of expression is not, in Mazhar's constitutional philosophy, merely one fundamental right among others; it is a prerequisite of all the others, because the genuine exercise of all other democratic rights depends on the availability of the information and the freedom of deliberation that genuine freedom of expression provides. A constitutional order that formally guarantees all the other rights of democratic citizenship while suppressing the freedom of expression that is their necessary condition is not merely inconsistent in its constitutional design; it is systematically undermining the conditions of its own democratic legitimacy.

The concept of epistemic justice, developed by the philosopher Miranda Fricker in her 2007 book of the same name, is directly relevant to Mazhar's constitutional analysis of press freedom. Fricker identifies two forms of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice, in which a speaker's credibility is unfairly diminished because of their identity or social position, and hermeneutical injustice, in which a gap in the collective interpretive resources available to a society prevents certain kinds of experience from being adequately understood or communicated. Both forms of epistemic injustice are constitutional injustices in Mazhar's analysis: they prevent the full and equal participation of all members of the constituent people in the democratic deliberation through which the political community constitutes and governs itself.

The Digital Security Act and its successor are instruments of epistemic injustice in both of Fricker's senses: they suppress the testimony of those whose experience and perspectives challenge the dominant narrative, and they create hermeneutical resources, the vocabulary of "defamation," "false information," and "threats to national security," that prevent certain forms of critical political analysis from being adequately communicated and received in the public sphere. Mazhar's insistence that genuine constitutional reform must include the repeal of these provisions and their replacement with a robust and genuinely effective protection of freedom of expression is therefore not merely a defense of press freedom as a professional interest of journalists and writers; it is a constitutional argument about the conditions of genuine popular sovereignty.

The post-uprising period has seen some improvement in the situation of press freedom in Bangladesh, with the release of many of those who had been imprisoned under the Digital Security Act and with the apparent decline in the most blatant forms of state-directed media control. But Mazhar's constitutional analysis insists that these improvements are insufficient as long as the legal framework that enabled the suppression remains in place, and as long as the structural conditions, the concentration of media ownership, the economic dependency of journalists on politically connected employers, and the social consequences of challenging the powerful, that make genuine freedom of expression practically impossible for many journalists and writers, remain unaddressed.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE RIGHTS OF MINORITIES AND THE CONSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF PLURALISM

The constitutional protection of the rights of minorities, including religious minorities, ethnic minorities, and indigenous peoples, is one of the most practically urgent dimensions of Mazhar's constitutional proposals and one of the areas where his constitutional philosophy most clearly distinguishes itself from both the secular nationalist tradition and the Islamist tradition.

The secular nationalist tradition in Bangladesh has historically justified the inadequate protection of minority rights on the grounds that the constitutional principle of secularism, by treating all citizens equally regardless of their religious affiliation, provides the necessary protection. This argument, which assumes that formal equality before the law is sufficient to protect the rights of minorities in a society where the majority exercises informal cultural and social power, is inadequate in precisely the ways that Mazhar's broader constitutional philosophy identifies: it mistakes formal legal equality for substantive political equality, and it ignores the ways in which informal social power can make formal legal protections effectively inaccessible to those who most need them.

The Islamist tradition has a different and in some respects more explicit problem with minority rights: its understanding of the proper relationship between Islamic governance and non-Muslim minorities, grounded in the classical Islamic concept of the *dhimma*, the protected status of non-Muslim minorities in an Islamic state, provides a framework for tolerating the presence of non-Muslim minorities while denying them genuine political equality. The *dhimma* concept,

whatever its historical importance as a relatively tolerant framework in the context of pre-modern empires, is fundamentally incompatible with the principle of equal citizenship that any genuinely democratic constitutional order must embody.

Mazhar's constitutional proposals address the rights of minorities through the principle of cultural plurality and equal recognition that we examined in Chapter Five, but the specific constitutional architecture through which this principle is to be expressed requires more detailed analysis. His approach draws on three distinct traditions of constitutional protection for minorities: the tradition of constitutional anti-discrimination law, the tradition of group rights and the rights of self-determination of peoples, and the tradition of power-sharing or consociational constitutional design.

The constitutional anti-discrimination tradition, exemplified by the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution and by the non-discrimination provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, provides protection for individual members of minority groups against discriminatory treatment by the state and by other individuals. This tradition is important and Mazhar's constitutional proposals endorse strong constitutional anti-discrimination provisions. But it is insufficient on its own because it addresses discrimination in the application of general laws while leaving unaddressed the ways in which facially neutral laws and policies can systematically disadvantage minority groups.

The tradition of group rights and the rights of self-determination of peoples, which has been developed most extensively in international human rights law through the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights' Article 27 on minority rights, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007, and the ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, provides a more robust framework for the constitutional protection of minority communities. Mazhar's constitutional proposals draw on this tradition in their recognition of the collective rights of indigenous peoples, including the hill peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts who have been in ongoing conflict with the Bangladeshi state over their land rights and their political autonomy since independence.

The tradition of consociational or power-sharing constitutional design, developed theoretically by Arend Lijphart and institutionalized in various forms in countries like Switzerland, Belgium, Lebanon, and Northern Ireland, provides mechanisms for managing deep social cleavages through constitutional arrangements that ensure the participation of all major community groups in political decision-making. Mazhar's constitutional proposals incorporate elements of this tradition in their insistence on proportional representation and on institutional arrangements that ensure the genuine participation of minority communities in the political process, without adopting the full consociational model, which he regards as potentially freezing the boundaries of communities and preventing the development of the forms of cross-community solidarity that genuine democratic community requires.

The specific case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts is one of the most pressing minority rights issues in Bangladesh and the one on which Mazhar has been most explicit and most politically engaged. The indigenous peoples of the Hill Tracts, who comprise around fifty ethnic groups including the Chakma, Marma, Tripura, and others, have been in conflict with the Bangladeshi state since the

early years of independence over their rights to their ancestral lands and over the question of their political autonomy. The Bangladesh-CHT Peace Accord of 1997, signed between the government and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samity (PCJSS), which represents the major Hill Tracts political organization, promised a range of political, economic, and cultural rights to the indigenous communities, but its implementation has been deeply inadequate, with many of its provisions remaining unimplemented more than two decades after its signing.

Mazhar's constitutional proposals for the Hill Tracts go beyond the provisions of the 1997 Peace Accord to demand genuine constitutional recognition of the rights of the indigenous peoples to their ancestral lands, their cultural traditions, and a meaningful degree of political autonomy over the governance of their territories. This is consistent with the international framework of indigenous rights established by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and with the broader principle of cultural plurality that forms one of the foundational principles of his constitutional philosophy.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: CONTEMPORARY THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENTS AND THE FUTURE OF CONSTITUENT POWER

The final chapter of Part Five examines the relationship between Mazhar's constitutional theory and the most significant contemporary developments in political theory, constitutional law, and democratic theory, assessing his contribution to the theoretical debates of the 2020s and beyond.

The most significant theoretical development in constitutional law in recent years relevant to Mazhar's work is the growing literature on what has been called democratic backsliding and constitutional regression. Scholars like Tom Ginsburg, Aziz Huq, Steven Levitsky, and Daniel Ziblatt have documented in detail the phenomenon of democratic decline through ostensibly democratic procedures: the use of formally legal mechanisms, including constitutional amendments, emergency powers, and the packing of courts and other independent institutions, to gradually dismantle the institutional conditions of genuine democratic governance while maintaining the formal procedures of electoral democracy.

This literature provides systematic comparative evidence for the argument that Mazhar has been making about the Bangladeshi constitutional experience for decades: that formal constitutional procedures are insufficient guarantees of genuine democratic governance, and that the protection of democratic politics requires substantive rather than merely procedural conditions. The comparative evidence from Hungary, Turkey, Poland, Venezuela, and other cases of democratic backsliding demonstrates that the mechanisms through which the Hasina government hollowed out Bangladeshi constitutional democracy are not unique to Bangladesh but represent a recognizable pattern of institutional manipulation that occurs across very different political and cultural contexts.

The theoretical literature on constitutional resilience, the conditions under which constitutional orders prove resistant to authoritarian manipulation, is directly relevant to the design challenges that Mazhar's constituent assembly proposal must address. The research of scholars like Tom

Ginsburg and Aziz Huq on "how democracies die gradually" and on the conditions that make constitutional orders more or less resilient to gradual authoritarian erosion, identifies several factors that correlate with constitutional resilience: the strength of civil society and of independent media, the degree of opposition party coordination in resisting executive overreach, the independence and quality of the judiciary, and the degree to which the constitutional framework contains effective mechanisms for the accountability of the executive to the legislature and to the courts.

Mazhar's constitutional proposals address all of these factors, but with characteristic philosophical depth that goes beyond the institutional design focus of the mainstream constitutional resilience literature. His argument that genuine constitutional resilience requires not only robust institutional design but the cultivation of the forms of political consciousness and political solidarity through which the constituent power can sustain its democratic self-determination against authoritarian erosion is an insight that the mainstream literature has been slower to develop but that is increasingly recognized as essential in the most sophisticated work on democratic resilience.

The growing literature on participatory and deliberative democracy is also directly relevant to Mazhar's constitutional proposals. The work of scholars like Archon Fung, Erik Olin Wright, and James Fishkin on deliberative polling, participatory budgeting, and other mechanisms for enhancing the genuine democratic participation of ordinary citizens in political decision-making provides empirical evidence for the feasibility of the forms of participatory democratic governance that Mazhar's constitutional philosophy advocates. The success of participatory budgeting experiments in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and in cities across the world has demonstrated that when genuine opportunities for democratic participation are created, ordinary citizens are capable of engaging in sophisticated and substantive deliberation about public policy and public resources.

The emerging literature on AI governance and its constitutional implications is a genuinely new area of contemporary relevance to constitutional theory more broadly, and Mazhar's constitutional philosophy has something important to contribute to the debates in this area. The development of artificial intelligence systems that are increasingly capable of performing tasks previously reserved for human beings, including in the domains of law, governance, and public administration, raises constitutional questions about accountability, transparency, and the conditions of genuine human self-determination that are directly relevant to Mazhar's analysis of the conditions of genuine popular sovereignty.

If AI systems are increasingly used to make or to inform decisions about the distribution of public goods, the enforcement of laws, and the governance of public institutions, without adequate mechanisms for democratic accountability and human oversight, then the formal constitutional provisions for popular sovereignty may be as effectively hollowed out by algorithmic governance as they have been by the informal mechanisms of political manipulation that Mazhar has analyzed throughout his constitutional work. The constitutional framework of the future must therefore address not only the traditional mechanisms of political power but the new mechanisms of algorithmic power that are increasingly shaping the conditions of human life and human political community.

Mazhar has not yet developed a systematic analysis of the constitutional implications of AI governance, but the philosophical framework he has developed throughout his intellectual career provides important resources for such an analysis. His insistence on the contextual, relational, and experientially grounded character of genuine knowledge, his critique of the pretension of abstract, universalizing knowledge systems to capture the full complexity of human experience, and his commitment to the democratic accountability of all forms of power to the constituent people who are affected by them, all have direct implications for the constitutional governance of AI systems and for the conditions under which such systems can be genuinely consistent with popular sovereignty.

CONCLUDING NOTE TO PART FIVE: THE CONSTITUTION AS PROMISE AND AS DEMAND

Part Five of this textbook has examined Farhad Mazhar's constitutional theory in its full systematic development, tracing its philosophical foundations, its historical analysis of the Bangladeshi constitutional experience, its substantive proposals for fundamental constitutional transformation, and its significance for the broader global debates about popular sovereignty, democratic legitimacy, and constitutional governance in the twenty-first century.

The central claim of Part Five has been that Mazhar has developed a constitutional theory that is both philosophically original and practically urgent, a theory that goes beyond the conventional alternatives of liberal constitutionalism and postcolonial critique to develop a genuinely new framework for thinking about the conditions of genuine popular sovereignty in the specific conditions of postcolonial Bangladesh. This framework draws on the Western constitutional tradition's foundational concepts of constituent power and popular sovereignty, on the critical tradition's analysis of the structural conditions that undermine formal constitutional guarantees, on the postcolonial tradition's attention to the specific pathologies of constitutional governance in former colonial states, and on the Bengali philosophical tradition's relational and ecological understanding of the foundations of genuine political community.

The analysis has shown that Mazhar's constitutional theory is not merely a theoretical exercise but has direct and urgent political relevance to the constitutional debates that are underway in Bangladesh in the aftermath of the 2024 uprising. His proposals for a genuine constituent assembly process, for a constitutional framework grounded in the seven principles of ongoing popular sovereignty, ecological constitutionalism, cultural plurality, political decentralization, genuine economic and social rights, constitutional resistance, and equal dignity, and for constitutional mechanisms that cultivate the forms of political consciousness and political solidarity necessary for genuine democratic self-determination, represent the most coherent and the most philosophically serious constitutional vision available in the current Bangladeshi political landscape.

The constitution, in Mazhar's constitutional philosophy, is simultaneously a promise and a demand. It is a promise: the promise of a political community to its members that it will organize its collective life around the principles of justice, dignity, and genuine self-determination. And it

is a demand: the demand that those principles be genuinely realized in the actual conditions of political life, that the formal guarantees of popular sovereignty be accompanied by the substantive conditions that make the genuine exercise of popular sovereignty possible. The work of constitutional transformation is, in this understanding, never finished; it is an ongoing practice of holding the promise to account, of demanding that the reality of political life measure up to the constitutional commitment, and of continuously renewing the constituent power of the people through the forms of political solidarity and political consciousness that alone can sustain genuine democratic self-determination.

Part Six of this textbook will examine Mazhar's engagement with the media, his use of the magazine *Chinta* as a vehicle for radical political thought, his relationship with the Bengali public sphere, his role as a controversialist and public intellectual, and the specific forms that his intellectual influence has taken on the political culture of Bangladesh, particularly in relation to the student movement of 2024 and its constitutional implications.

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End of Part Five. Part Six will examine Farhad Mazhar's role as a public intellectual and controversialist, analyzing his use of Chinta magazine and other media platforms as vehicles for radical political engagement, the specific forms of his influence on the political culture of Bangladesh, and the relationship between his intellectual project and the student movement that led the 2024 uprising, placing his public intellectual practice in the context of the broader debates about the role of the intellectual in democratic political life.

PART SIX: THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL, THE MEDIA, AND THE POLITICS OF RADICAL THOUGHT

PROLOGUE TO PART SIX: THE INTELLECTUAL IN THE ARENA

There is a long and distinguished tradition in the history of political thought of distinguishing between two fundamentally different modes of intellectual activity. The first is the mode of the scholar, the thinker who works within the protected walls of the academy, who addresses a specialized audience of peers, who measures their contribution by the standards of disciplinary rigor, and who remains, by professional convention and personal temperament, at a certain remove from the immediate fray of political life. The second is the mode of the public intellectual, the thinker who carries their ideas into the contested terrain of public discourse, who addresses not only their fellow scholars but the broader citizenry, who accepts the risks of misrepresentation and political attack that come with intellectual engagement in an environment where ideas have consequences, and who measures their contribution not only by the standards of scholarly precision but by the standards of political effect.

Farhad Mazhar has, throughout his intellectual career, exemplified the second mode with a consistency and a commitment that is rare even among those who identify themselves as public intellectuals. He has never retreated to the academy, never sought the protection of institutional affiliation, and never measured his intellectual work primarily by the standards of scholarly reception. He has worked, instead, in the arena, in the literal and figurative sense of that term: in the public squares, the newspaper columns, the magazine pages, the protest gatherings, the seminar halls open to all comers, and the digital platforms where Bangladeshi public life is contested and negotiated. He has done this at enormous personal cost, including imprisonment, enforced disappearance, death threats, sustained campaigns of vilification by partisans of every political stripe, and the kind of grinding social marginalization that powerful institutions reserve for those who refuse to be domesticated by them.

Part Six of this textbook is concerned with this dimension of Mazhar's intellectual career: with the specific forms and vehicles of his public intellectual practice, with the institutional architecture he has built to sustain that practice, with the rhetorical strategies and analytical methods that characterize his interventions in the Bangladeshi public sphere, with the controversies that have marked his engagement with political life, and with the extraordinary culmination of his intellectual influence in the mass uprising of July and August 2024 and its complex and contested aftermath. This examination requires, in addition to biographical and analytical attention to Mazhar himself, sustained engagement with the broader theoretical debates about the role of the intellectual in democratic political life, with the philosophy of public reason and the conditions of genuine public deliberation, and with the specific conditions of intellectual practice in postcolonial societies where the structural inequalities of colonial inheritance shape the possibilities and the limitations of public intellectual engagement.

The analysis proceeds through nine chapters. Chapter Sixteen examines Chinta, the magazine that Mazhar founded and that served as the primary vehicle for his public intellectual practice for more than three decades. Chapter Seventeen analyzes his rhetorical strategies and intellectual

style, examining how he deploys theoretical resources in public argumentation. Chapter Eighteen examines the institutional infrastructure of his intellectual project: UBINIG, Nayakrishi Andolon, and the various organizations through which he has translated intellectual argument into social practice. Chapter Nineteen addresses his relationship with the Bengali literary tradition and his practice as a poet in relationship to his practice as a political thinker. Chapter Twenty examines the 2017 enforced disappearance and its political and philosophical dimensions. Chapter Twenty-One provides a detailed analysis of his 2023 book *Gono-Ovyutthan o Gathan* and its role in shaping the intellectual and political framework of the 2024 uprising. Chapter Twenty-Two examines the uprising itself, tracing the specific pathways of Mazhar's intellectual influence. Chapter Twenty-Three examines the post-uprising period and Mazhar's ongoing interventions in the debates about the incomplete revolution and the emerging threat of religious fascism. Chapter Twenty-Four places Mazhar's public intellectual practice in the context of the global networks of critical thought with which he is connected.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: CHINTA AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF A RADICAL PUBLIC SPHERE

The history of radical political thought in every society is inseparable from the history of the publications through which that thought has been circulated, debated, and disseminated. The relationship between intellectual production and the media through which it is carried is not a merely technical one: the form of a publication shapes the content of the thought it carries, and the institutional conditions under which a publication operates shape the intellectual possibilities available to those who write for it. The great journals of radical thought in the modern period, from the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* through which Marx engaged with the revolutionary politics of 1848 to Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes* to the *Tricontinental* through which Che Guevara addressed the revolutionary movements of the global south, have been not merely vehicles for the transmission of ideas but themselves intellectual and political projects, constitutive of the intellectual communities and political formations they served.

Chinta, the Bengali-language magazine that Farhad Mazhar founded and edited, belongs in this tradition. It is not merely a publication; it is an institution, a political project, and a philosophical program. Its founding and its development over more than thirty years represent one of the most sustained and deliberate attempts to build a genuinely radical public sphere in the history of Bangladeshi intellectual life. To understand Chinta is to understand one of the central dimensions of Mazhar's intellectual practice: his understanding of what a radical public sphere requires, how it can be built under conditions of political constraint and economic scarcity, and what it can accomplish.

The name Chinta is the Bengali word for thought, thinking, or reflection. It is a word with a rich philosophical history in the Sanskrit-derived languages of South Asia, connected through its etymology to the concepts of contemplation, meditation, and the active engagement of the mind with the problems of existence. In choosing this name for his magazine, Mazhar was making a philosophical statement: the kind of engagement he envisioned was not the transmission of ready-made conclusions but the practice of active thinking, thinking that engages with the

contradictions and complexities of the actual world rather than imposing preconceived frameworks upon it.

The institutional context in which Chinta was founded and operated is an essential part of its significance. Bangladesh in the late 1980s, when Mazhar returned from his period of study and work in New York and began to organize his intellectual project in a more systematic way, was a country whose public sphere was severely constricted by the combined effects of military rule, the legacy of authoritarian governance under successive regimes, the economic dependence of the media on politically connected business interests, and the structural inequalities that limited access to education and literacy. The major newspapers and magazines were owned by powerful business interests with close connections to the political establishment, and their editorial policies reflected those connections. The space available for genuinely critical, independent intellectual work was narrow and subject to constant political pressure.

In this context, the founding of an independent magazine committed to radical political analysis, philosophical reflection, and the cultivation of critical thinking represented a genuinely important institutional act. Chinta was not, in the conventional sense, a commercial venture. It was subsidized, as independent radical publications almost invariably are, by the intellectual labor of its contributors, by the support of sympathetic readers, and by the financial resources that Mazhar was able to generate through his other activities. Its production values were modest, its distribution network limited, and its circulation, measured in purely quantitative terms, relatively small. But these conventional measures of commercial success entirely misunderstand the function of a publication like Chinta in the intellectual and political landscape of Bangladesh.

Chinta's influence operated through mechanisms that are different from those through which mass-circulation commercial media exerts influence. Its readers were disproportionately members of the educated intellectual class: students, teachers, activists, journalists, lawyers, and others who were engaged with the questions it addressed and who were capable of carrying its ideas into wider circulation through their own networks and their own activities. The trickle-down effect of intellectual influence, from the small but influential readership of a specialized radical magazine to the broader networks of political and intellectual life, is well-documented in the sociology of knowledge and in the history of radical movements. Small circulation publications have repeatedly played disproportionately large roles in shaping the intellectual frameworks through which political crises are understood and political responses are organized.

The editorial philosophy of Chinta, as articulated by Mazhar in various statements and interviews, was organized around several commitments that together constituted a distinctive approach to radical intellectual practice. The first was a commitment to theoretical seriousness: the magazine would engage with the major theoretical debates of the international intellectual left, including debates about Marxist political economy, postcolonial theory, feminist theory, ecological thought, and the philosophy of religion, rather than retreating to the simplified formulations of orthodox ideology. This commitment reflected Mazhar's conviction, formed through his experience at the New School and through his engagement with the international critical tradition, that the problems facing Bangladesh and the global south required the most sophisticated theoretical resources available, and that the tendency of the orthodox left to police the boundaries of acceptable thought was itself a form of intellectual cowardice.

The second commitment was to rootedness in the specific conditions and traditions of Bangladesh and the Bengali world. Chinta would not merely apply international theoretical frameworks to Bangladeshi problems; it would bring Bangladeshi and Bengali intellectual traditions, including the philosophical traditions of the Baul and Fakiri movements, the agrarian traditions of the peasant communities, and the literary traditions of Bengali modernism, into genuine dialogue with international theoretical resources. This commitment reflected Mazhar's conviction that genuine intellectual work must be rooted in the specific cultural and historical conditions of the people it addresses, and that the pretension of abstract universal theory to transcend those conditions was itself a form of intellectual domination.

The third commitment was to political urgency. Chinta was not an academic journal whose articles could wait for the slow rhythms of scholarly review and publication. It was a magazine that engaged with the immediate political crises of Bangladeshi life, with the constitutional manipulations of successive governments, with the suppression of democratic rights, with the structural injustices of the agrarian economy, with the cultural politics of national identity, and with the human rights violations that the political establishment preferred to keep invisible. This commitment to political urgency was not inconsistent with the commitment to theoretical seriousness: Mazhar's conviction was that genuine theoretical seriousness and genuine political urgency are not only compatible but mutually reinforcing, that the most practically effective political analysis is also the most theoretically rigorous.

The fourth commitment, perhaps the most distinctive and the most philosophically significant, was to what Mazhar understood as the democratization of thought. Chinta was not intended to be read only by those who already possessed the cultural capital to navigate sophisticated theoretical discourse. It was intended to be written in a way that could be understood by educated readers who lacked specialized academic training, to make complex theoretical arguments accessible without sacrificing their complexity, and to use the resources of Bengali literary culture, including poetry, story, metaphor, and the rich tradition of argumentative rhetoric in Bengali intellectual discourse, to carry philosophical ideas to readers who might not respond to the dry idiom of academic prose.

This commitment to the democratization of thought is worth pausing on, because it connects to one of the most important and most contested questions in the theory of the public intellectual. The philosopher Jurgen Habermas, whose theory of the public sphere has been one of the most influential frameworks for thinking about the conditions of democratic political deliberation, argued that genuine public reason requires communicative rationality, the kind of reasoning that is oriented toward mutual understanding and that is governed by norms of universality, intelligibility, and good faith. The critics of Habermas, including Nancy Fraser, Seyla Benhabib, and the theorists of subaltern counter-publics, have argued that his model of the public sphere is too narrowly rationalistic, that it fails to account for the ways in which exclusions of class, gender, race, and culture shape access to the public sphere, and that it undervalues the forms of communication, including narrative, rhetoric, and cultural expression, through which marginalized groups have historically made their voices heard.

Mazhar's approach to the Chinta project implicitly navigates between these positions in a way that is philosophically distinctive. He does not abandon the commitment to rigorous argument

that Habermas's model requires: the pages of Chinta have consistently offered some of the most sophisticated political and philosophical analysis available in the Bangladeshi public sphere. But he also refuses the narrowly rationalistic model of public reason that strips political discourse of its emotional, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions. His conviction that poetry and philosophical argument are not merely compatible but mutually illuminating, that the forms of knowledge carried by the Baul tradition and by the great Bengali literary tradition are not mere ornaments to the serious business of political analysis but are themselves forms of genuine intellectual engagement, represents a distinctive contribution to the theory of the democratic public sphere that has become increasingly relevant to contemporary debates in deliberative democracy.

The content of Chinta over its thirty-plus years of publication reflects the full range of Mazhar's intellectual preoccupations. Agricultural politics and the defense of peasant knowledge systems against the encroachments of corporate agribusiness occupied a central place. Constitutional analysis and critique of the structural defects of the Bangladeshi state was a recurrent theme. Philosophical reflection on the relationship between Islamic thought and secular political theory was explored with unusual openness and rigor. Feminist analysis of the conditions of women in Bangladeshi society was developed by Mazhar and by contributors including his partner Farida Akhter, whose own intellectual contributions to the magazine were substantial and independent. Ecological analysis of the environmental consequences of development policies was given sustained attention long before the term climate change became a staple of mainstream political discourse. And cultural criticism of the dominant forms of national identity and the politics of cultural authenticity in Bangladesh was conducted with the kind of iconoclastic energy that was guaranteed to generate controversy.

The specific contributions of Chinta to the formation of the intellectual and political framework of the 2024 uprising will be examined in detail in Chapter Twenty-One. But it is important, at this earlier stage of the analysis, to note the structural function that Chinta served in the development of Bangladesh's radical intellectual culture over several decades. By providing a sustained, independent, theoretically serious venue for critical political thought, by maintaining its editorial independence through periods when that independence came at significant personal and financial cost, and by consistently refusing the temptations of political alignment with any of the powerful institutional actors who might have offered material support in exchange for intellectual accommodation, Mazhar built, through Chinta, something that is extraordinarily valuable and extraordinarily difficult to build: a reputation for intellectual integrity.

That reputation is not merely a biographical asset; it is a political resource. In a public sphere characterized by the systematic corruption of political discourse, by the dependence of most media on the patronage of the powerful, and by the social rewards available to those who accommodate themselves to the demands of the prevailing political establishment, the reputation for intellectual integrity is simultaneously rare, politically valuable, and personally dangerous. It is politically valuable because it creates the conditions under which critical analysis can be received as analysis rather than dismissed as mere partisan advocacy. And it is personally dangerous precisely because it refuses the protection that comes with accommodation, the implicit understanding that those who confine their criticism to acceptable limits will be permitted to operate, while those who do not are subject to the full repertoire of state and para-state repression.

The theory of the public sphere developed by Habermas and its critics has been significantly refined in the two decades since its initial formulation, and the most recent developments in this theoretical tradition are directly relevant to understanding both the significance and the limitations of the Chinta project. The work of Fraser on subaltern counter-publics, the analysis of Michael Warner on the formation of publics and counter-publics through the circulation of texts, and the more recent work of scholars like Noortje Marres on the digital transformation of public sphere politics all contribute to a richer understanding of how publications like Chinta function within the broader ecology of a political public sphere.

Fraser's concept of the subaltern counter-public is particularly useful. Fraser argues, against Habermas's idealization of a single, unified bourgeois public sphere, that in stratified societies there exist multiple competing publics, and that for subordinated social groups, the formation of counter-publics, separate deliberative arenas where members can formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs, serves important political functions. These counter-publics are not simply retreats from the broader public sphere; they are training grounds for political engagement, spaces in which subaltern groups develop the discursive resources to challenge the dominant interpretations of their situation and to articulate alternative political programs.

Chinta functions as precisely this kind of counter-public formation. It has provided, over more than three decades, a space in which the dominant narratives of Bangladeshi political life, the Awami League's narrative of the liberation war and its monopoly over the progressive political tradition, the secular nationalist narrative's dismissal of religious thought as inherently reactionary, the developmental state's narrative of modernization through economic growth, and the orthodox left's narrative of class struggle as the sufficient framework for understanding all political phenomena, have been subjected to sustained critical analysis. It has been a space in which alternative interpretations have been formulated, debated, and refined. And it has been, as the events of 2024 demonstrated, a space whose intellectual products have proven capable of influencing political action at the most critical moments of political transformation.

The recent scholarly literature on the role of magazines and little reviews in the formation of intellectual and political movements is also relevant here. The work of scholars like Sean Latham and Robert Scholes on the role of little magazines in the formation of literary modernism, and the more politically oriented work on the role of radical periodicals in the formation of revolutionary movements, from the analysis of Lenin's *Iskra* to the literature on the role of clandestine publications in anti-colonial movements, all illuminate the mechanism through which a small-circulation publication can exercise influence disproportionate to its circulation figures. The key variable is not the size of the readership but the quality of the engagement: small publications that are read carefully by people who are in a position to act on what they read can change the world in ways that mass-circulation media, consumed passively and forgotten quickly, cannot.

The digital transformation of the media landscape in Bangladesh over the past decade has changed the conditions under which Chinta operates and has extended its reach in ways that were not possible in its earlier years. The growth of internet access in Bangladesh, the proliferation of online platforms for political commentary and debate, and the role of social media in the

mobilization of political movements have all created new conditions for the circulation of radical political thought. Mazhar and Chinta have adapted to these new conditions, using online platforms to distribute content that the traditional print format could not carry, and engaging with the new forms of political discourse that digital media makes possible. The role of online platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, and various Bangladeshi digital media organizations, in carrying Mazhar's ideas to the student activists who led the 2024 uprising will be examined in detail in Chapter Twenty-Two.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: THE ART OF CONTROVERSY: MAZHAR'S RHETORICAL STRATEGIES AND INTELLECTUAL STYLE

Any serious account of Farhad Mazhar as a public intellectual must engage with the question of his rhetorical practice: the specific ways in which he formulates arguments, the distinctive qualities of his intellectual style, the kinds of provocations he deploys, and the specific forms of resistance and controversy that his mode of engagement generates. This is not merely a biographical question about personality and temperament, though personality and temperament are certainly relevant. It is a philosophical and political question about the theory of public intellectual practice: about what kinds of rhetorical strategies are appropriate and effective for a thinker whose goal is not merely to persuade a specialized academic audience but to intervene in the contested terrain of public political discourse.

The first and most fundamental characteristic of Mazhar's rhetorical practice is what might be called his refusal of false comfort. He does not soften the edges of uncomfortable arguments in order to make them more acceptable to audiences that might be disturbed by their implications. He does not retreat into qualifications and hedges when directness is what the argument demands. He does not give the established powers the courtesy of polite disagreement when what he believes the situation calls for is the kind of direct confrontation that the polite forms of political discourse are designed to prevent. This refusal of false comfort is not mere temperamental combativeness; it is a principled rhetorical choice grounded in a specific understanding of the conditions under which genuine political change becomes possible.

The theoretical foundation for this understanding can be found in several traditions that have shaped Mazhar's intellectual practice. The Frankfurt School's critique of the culture industry and of the forms of ideological accommodation that it produces provides one resource: the argument, developed most powerfully by Theodor Adorno, that genuine critical thought must maintain a certain intransigence, a refusal to smooth over the contradictions that it identifies, because the smoothing over of contradictions is itself one of the primary mechanisms through which ideological domination reproduces itself. When critical thought accommodates itself to the terms of the prevailing discourse, when it accepts the implicit framework of what can be said and what cannot be said in polite public conversation, it reproduces the ideological conditions it claims to be analyzing.

A second theoretical resource is the tradition of what Michel Foucault called *parrhesia*, the ancient Greek concept of frank speech, speech that tells the truth without regard for personal

safety or social advantage. Foucault's late lectures on parrhesia, delivered at the College de France in the early 1980s, developed a rich analysis of the conditions and the practice of speaking truth to power, identifying parrhesia as a specific ethical relationship between the speaker, the truth they speak, and the power they address. The parrhesiastes, the practitioner of frank speech, is not merely someone who tells the truth; they are someone who accepts the personal risk that comes with telling a truth that the powerful do not want to hear, and this acceptance of risk is itself part of what gives their speech its force and its political significance.

Mazhar's rhetorical practice fits the model of parrhesia with remarkable precision. His willingness to name the ruling parties as fascist when that naming carried the risk of imprisonment, his willingness to challenge the narratives of the liberation war when those narratives were protected by the formal authority of the state and the informal authority of powerful social institutions, his willingness to assert, publicly and repeatedly, that the constitution requires not reform but fundamental replacement when that assertion made him the target of campaigns of vilification, all represent the practice of frank speech in conditions where frank speech is genuinely dangerous. The personal costs he has paid for this practice, documented in Chapter Twenty, are both a testament to its genuineness and an illustration of the structural conditions under which public intellectual practice in Bangladesh operates.

The second characteristic of Mazhar's rhetorical practice is his strategic use of conceptual juxtaposition. He regularly places in direct confrontation with each other concepts and traditions that are conventionally kept apart, not by accident but as part of a deliberate rhetorical strategy designed to force his readers to think about what they usually take for granted. His juxtapositions of Marx and Lalou, of constitutional theory and agrarian practice, of Islamic philosophy and Frankfurt School critical theory, of the discourse of human rights and the discourse of peasant knowledge systems, are not mere eclecticism or theoretical confusion. They are interventions designed to disrupt the cognitive habits that prevent genuine critical thinking and to open up new spaces of political and philosophical reflection.

This rhetorical strategy has its theoretical parallel in what the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, in his reading of Nietzsche, described as the practice of provocation: the creation of conceptual provocations that force the mind to work, that disrupt the automatic functioning of habituated thought, and that open up the possibility of genuinely new thinking. Mazhar's intellectual juxtapositions function as provocations in precisely this sense. They are not designed to provide easy answers but to generate productive intellectual discomfort, to make the reader aware that the conceptual frameworks they habitually employ may be inadequate to the realities they claim to illuminate.

The third characteristic of Mazhar's rhetorical practice is his insistence on naming specific institutional actors and their specific institutional interests. He does not, in the manner of some radical theorists, remain at the level of structural analysis, speaking of capitalism, imperialism, and state power as abstract forces without identifying the specific actors who instantiate these structural forces in concrete political situations. He names the Awami League as fascist when he believes it to be fascist. He names the military establishment's role in political manipulation when that role is being systematically denied by the political class. He names the international financial institutions and their Bangladeshi client politicians when he analyzes the structural

adjustment policies that have transformed the agrarian economy. This insistence on naming names is both a rhetorical practice and a political commitment: it is the insistence that structural analysis must be capable of identifying the specific human agents and specific institutional interests that structural forces operate through, because without that specificity, structural analysis becomes a form of political evasion.

This approach generates controversy of a very specific kind. It makes Mazhar political enemies in a way that purely structural analysis does not. It creates the conditions for libel charges, for the kind of political persecution that he has suffered, and for the campaigns of character assassination that powerful institutions deploy against those who name their operations specifically. But it also, and this is Mazhar's explicit justification for the practice, creates the conditions for political accountability: the identification of specific agents and their specific interests is a prerequisite for the kind of political action that can change those interests or constrain their operation.

The fourth characteristic is his practice of what might be called theoretical democratization. He does not write for an expert audience alone. He consistently makes the effort to translate complex theoretical arguments into forms that can be understood and engaged with by educated readers who lack specialized academic training. He uses examples, metaphors, historical narratives, and the resources of Bengali literary culture to carry philosophical ideas that might otherwise remain confined to the academy into the broader arena of public political discourse. This is not a matter of dumbing down; it is a matter of intellectual translation, the difficult and skilled art of making complex ideas genuinely accessible without sacrificing their complexity.

The practice of theoretical democratization has both philosophical and political dimensions. Philosophically, it reflects Mazhar's conviction, consistent with his broader epistemological commitments, that the knowledge that matters for political life is not the exclusive property of a credentialed intellectual class. The farmers who have developed the seed-saving practices of Nayakrishi over generations possess knowledge that is as philosophically significant, for the purposes of understanding human life in its ecological and social dimensions, as the knowledge of the university-trained agricultural scientist. The Baul singer whose songs carry a philosophical tradition of centuries is not inferior, as a thinker, to the professor of philosophy who can cite the latest issue of a major journal. The democratization of theory, in Mazhar's understanding, is not merely a pedagogical exercise; it is a political commitment to taking seriously the intelligence and the capacity for reflection of those who have been systematically excluded from the formal institutions through which legitimate knowledge is produced and recognized.

Politically, the practice of theoretical democratization is a strategy for building the kind of broad intellectual movement that genuine political transformation requires. Mazhar has consistently argued, and the events of 2024 appear to have vindicated this argument, that fundamental political change in Bangladesh requires not only organized political movement but the transformation of political consciousness, the development of a broad public capacity to analyze the structural conditions of political life and to articulate alternatives to them. This capacity cannot be built if the theoretical resources for such analysis remain confined to the pages of academic journals and the seminar rooms of universities. It requires the development of forms of political education and intellectual formation that are accessible to the broader population and

that connect theoretical analysis to the concrete lived experience of the people most directly affected by the political structures being analyzed.

The fifth and final characteristic of Mazhar's rhetorical practice that deserves extended analysis is his use of irony, both as a rhetorical device and as a philosophical stance. Irony in Mazhar's writing is not mere wit or satirical amusement, though it is certainly both of these. It is a philosophical commitment to maintaining awareness of the gap between the stated principles of political institutions and their actual practice, between the promises that political actors make and the interests they actually serve, between the official narratives of national history and the reality those narratives are designed to conceal. This ironic stance is not nihilistic; it does not collapse into the view that all political principles are mere cover for interests and that genuine political idealism is therefore impossible. It is, rather, the kind of critical realism that refuses both naive idealism and cynical reductionism: the insistence that the gap between principle and practice is real and must be named, precisely because that naming is the precondition for the work of closing the gap.

The recent theoretical literature on irony and political thought, including the work of Judith Shklar on the ironic liberal tradition, the analysis of Richard Rorty on irony and solidarity, and the more recent work of post-Rortian scholars on the relationship between irony and democratic politics, provides useful theoretical context for understanding this dimension of Mazhar's rhetorical practice. But it is important to note that Mazhar's irony is distinctively different from the liberal irony that Rorty celebrates, which is ultimately a private stance accompanied by public solidarity. Mazhar's irony is a public practice, a form of political speech that uses the gap between promise and performance as a lever for political criticism and political mobilization.

The controversies that Mazhar's rhetorical practice has generated are not incidental to the political function of that practice; they are constitutive of it. The political establishment's attempts to silence him, the campaigns of vilification conducted by partisans of different political factions, the legal actions taken against him, and the physical dangers he has faced are all responses to the specific characteristics of his rhetorical practice described above. Each of these responses demonstrates, in its own way, that the provocations he has deployed have been effective: that the powerful have felt sufficiently threatened by his interventions to devote significant resources to countering them. The measure of a radical public intellectual's effectiveness is not, after all, the applause of the comfortable, but the discomfort of the powerful.

The specific controversies generated by Mazhar's interventions will be examined in detail throughout Part Six. But it is useful at this point to note that these controversies fall into several distinct categories. There are controversies generated by his analysis of the political establishment, in which he has named specific parties and specific leaders as agents of fascism, exploitation, and political violence. There are controversies generated by his philosophical positions on religion and politics, in which his attempt to develop a non-secular framework that is simultaneously non-Islamist has generated criticism from both secular nationalists and Islamist political actors. There are controversies generated by his positions on the 1971 liberation war and its legacy, in which his refusal to endorse the official Awami League narrative while also refusing the alternative narratives offered by the right has placed him in the position of being attacked from multiple political directions simultaneously. And there are controversies generated

by his positions on the constitutional questions that have become central to Bangladeshi political life since 2024, in which his insistence on the need for a constituent assembly and a genuinely new constitutional order has put him in conflict with both those who want to preserve the 1972 constitution and those who want to replace it with an Islamist alternative.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: UBINIG, NAYAKRISHI ANDOLON, AND THE POLITICS OF ALTERNATIVE INSTITUTIONS

Farhad Mazhar has never been content with the role of the intellectual commentator who analyzes the failures of existing institutions from the outside without taking on the responsibility of building alternative ones. A distinctive and philosophically significant feature of his intellectual project is the consistent attempt to translate theoretical analysis into institutional practice, to build the organizations, the networks, the agricultural movements, and the social infrastructure through which alternative modes of living and knowing can be sustained in the face of the dominant forces of capitalist development and state power.

The most important of these institutional projects is UBINIG, the Policy Research for Development Alternative, which Mazhar co-founded with Farida Akhter in the 1980s and which has operated for more than four decades as one of the most distinctive and influential research and advocacy organizations in Bangladesh. UBINIG's name and its founding mission reflect the central conviction of Mazhar's intellectual project: that genuine alternatives to the dominant development model are both necessary and possible, and that the work of building those alternatives requires not only intellectual analysis but sustained organizational commitment and direct engagement with the communities most directly affected by the failures of the dominant model.

UBINIG's intellectual and political orientation is organized around several core commitments that directly reflect Mazhar's theoretical positions. The first is a commitment to what might be called epistemological democracy: the conviction that the knowledge generated by communities through their lived practice, through their accumulated experience of working with specific soils, specific seeds, specific water systems, and specific ecological relationships, is not merely anecdotal data to be incorporated into the models of expert science but is itself a form of genuine scientific knowledge, a form of knowledge that may in certain respects be superior to the knowledge generated by the formal institutions of agricultural science.

This epistemological commitment has direct practical consequences for UBINIG's work. Rather than approaching the farming communities it works with as beneficiaries of development interventions designed by outside experts, UBINIG has consistently worked to document, preserve, and strengthen the indigenous knowledge systems of those communities. This approach, which has strong theoretical grounding in the philosophy of science literature on tacit knowledge developed by Michael Polanyi, in the work of Paul Feyerabend on the plurality of legitimate knowledge traditions, in James Scott's analysis of *metis*, the practical knowledge of local communities, in his book *Seeing Like a State*, and in the more recent literature on indigenous knowledge systems and their relationship to formal science, has generated important

practical results in the areas of seed sovereignty, ecological agriculture, and the resistance to the corporate appropriation of biological resources.

The second major institutional project associated with Mazhar's broader intellectual program is the Nayakrishi Andolon, the New Agriculture Movement, which was established through UBINIG in the 1990s and which has grown into one of the most significant grassroots agricultural movements in Bangladesh. Nayakrishi, which means literally new cultivation or new agriculture, is built on the principle that genuine sustainable agriculture must be grounded in the biodiversity-based, community-managed seed systems that have sustained Bengali peasant agriculture for centuries, rather than on the high-input, chemically dependent, corporate seed-based agriculture that the international development establishment and the Bangladeshi state have consistently promoted.

The practical achievements of Nayakrishi Andolon are substantial and well-documented. Over three decades, the movement has established a network of community seed banks across Bangladesh, preserving thousands of varieties of rice, vegetables, and other crops that the Green Revolution model was eliminating in favor of the small number of high-yielding varieties promoted by international agricultural corporations and development agencies. It has developed and disseminated practices of ecological farming that reduce dependency on synthetic fertilizers and pesticides while maintaining or improving yields and dramatically improving the nutritional quality and the resilience of the agricultural systems it works with. And it has built, in the process, a social and organizational infrastructure of farmer networks, women's groups, and community knowledge-sharing institutions that constitutes a genuine alternative to both the market-dependent individual farm of neoliberal agricultural economics and the state-managed collective farm of socialist agricultural planning.

The theoretical significance of Nayakrishi Andolon for Mazhar's intellectual project goes beyond its practical agricultural achievements. It represents, in concrete and practical form, the alternative to what he has consistently criticized as the colonial and neocolonial knowledge system: the pretension of modern industrial science to replace the traditional knowledge systems of peasant communities with a single, universally applicable agricultural technology developed by expert institutions and marketed by transnational corporations. The movement demonstrates, in practice rather than in theory alone, that the farmers who have been dismissed by the development establishment as practitioners of backward traditional agriculture are in fact the possessors of a sophisticated, ecologically grounded, and practically effective knowledge system that can sustain both livelihoods and biodiversity in ways that industrial agriculture cannot.

The political economy of the Nayakrishi movement is directly relevant to Mazhar's broader constitutional analysis. The movement's resistance to corporate seed monopolies, to the patenting of biological resources, and to the extension of intellectual property rights over the seed commons represents, in practice, exactly the kind of resistance to the corporate capture of common resources that his constitutional theory advocates in the political domain. The parallels between the corporate appropriation of the seed commons and the political establishment's appropriation of the constitutional commons, in both cases the conversion of resources that belong to a community into instruments of private power, are ones that Mazhar has drawn explicitly and with philosophical precision.

UBINIG has also been the institutional base for Farida Akhter's substantial intellectual contributions to the Mazhar project. Akhter's work, which deserves to be analyzed as an independent intellectual achievement as well as a collaborative one, has focused particularly on the feminist dimensions of the agricultural and development politics that UBINIG addresses. Her analysis of the relationship between women's reproductive rights and agricultural biodiversity, her critique of population control policies and their relationship to the development agenda, and her work on the political economy of women's labor in Bangladeshi agriculture have all been carried through UBINIG and have significantly extended the intellectual reach of the project Mazhar initiated.

The appointment of Farida Akhter as an adviser to the 2024 interim government of Muhammad Yunus represents a moment of significant institutional recognition for the intellectual project that she and Mazhar have built together through UBINIG. It also raises important questions about the relationship between the critical intellectual project they have sustained and the institutional power of the state. The tension between the independence that has characterized their intellectual project and the responsibilities that come with state power is not one that can be resolved easily, and Mazhar's own interventions in the post-uprising period, examined in Chapter Twenty-Three, reflect the complexities of that tension.

The intellectual legacy of UBINIG and Nayakrishi Andolon extends well beyond Bangladesh. The movement has been recognized internationally as a model of community-based alternative development, and it has engaged with international networks of food sovereignty advocacy, ecological agriculture, and indigenous knowledge rights that represent important dimensions of the global movement for alternatives to neoliberal development. The organization's membership in La Via Campesina, the international peasant movement organization, and its engagement with the debates at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations about seed sovereignty and the rights of farmers connect its work to the global politics of food systems in ways that give Mazhar's theoretical arguments about agricultural knowledge and popular sovereignty a concrete institutional grounding.

The recent developments in the theory of commons governance, particularly the work that builds on Elinor Ostrom's Nobel Prize-winning analysis of how communities manage common pool resources, provide important theoretical context for understanding the intellectual significance of the Nayakrishi model. Ostrom's work, which demonstrated through detailed empirical analysis that communities are capable of managing common resources sustainably without either private property rights or state management, provided a systematic empirical foundation for the theoretical arguments about community governance that Mazhar had been developing on philosophical grounds. The convergence between Ostrom's empirical work and Mazhar's philosophical arguments represents one of the most interesting points of connection between his intellectual project and the mainstream social science literature.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: POETRY, PHILOSOPHY, AND THE LITERARY TRADITION: MAZHAR AS A BENGALI POET

It would be a serious intellectual error to treat Mazhar's poetry as a sidebar to his philosophical and political work, an aesthetic expression of intellectual energies whose primary home is in prose argument. The relationship between his poetry and his philosophy is not additive but constitutive: the poems are not illustrations of arguments that could equally well have been made in prose, and the arguments are not prose translations of insights that could equally well have been expressed poetically. They are two modes of the same intellectual project, each addressing aspects of experience and understanding that the other cannot fully reach.

The Bengali poetic tradition within which Mazhar operates is one of the great literary traditions of the world, and to understand his poetry requires some understanding of that tradition. Bengali literature has produced, over more than a millennium, a body of philosophical and devotional poetry of extraordinary richness and depth, from the Charyapada of the medieval Buddhist tradition through the Vaishnava poetry of the medieval period to the Baul and Fakiri traditions of which Lalon Shah is the supreme representative, and from there to the canonical modernity of Rabindranath Tagore and the subsequent modernisms of the twentieth century. This tradition is not merely a literary heritage; it is a repository of philosophical knowledge, a way of engaging with the deepest questions of human existence through the concentrated resources of language, meter, image, and song.

Mazhar's poetry is rooted in this tradition but does not simply reproduce it. His relationship to the tradition is, characteristically, simultaneously reverential and critical. He has learned from Lalon's philosophical method, from the Baul tradition's practice of deploying paradox and indirect statement to carry truths that direct statement would falsify or flatten, and from Tagore's synthesis of the lyric and the philosophical, the personal and the political. But he has also brought to Bengali poetry the theoretical resources of his engagement with European modernism, with the Frankfurt School's critique of aesthetic rationalization, with the postcolonial analysis of the relationship between language and power, and with the specific political conditions of Bangladesh in the second half of the twentieth century.

The influence of T.S. Eliot and the poetic modernism of the early twentieth century can be detected in certain formal features of Mazhar's verse, particularly in his use of fragmentation, juxtaposition, and allusion as structural principles. But the philosophical content of his poetry is entirely different from Eliot's conservative aestheticism: where Eliot's fragmentation expresses a conservative despair about the dissolution of cultural tradition, Mazhar's fragmentation expresses the condition of a people whose cultural identity has been repeatedly shattered by colonial violence and political manipulation, and whose task is not to lament the fragments but to discover in them the materials for a new synthesis.

The influence of Pablo Neruda and the Latin American poetic tradition of committed verse is also visible in certain registers of Mazhar's poetry, particularly in his poems of political indictment, where the resources of lyrical intensity are deployed in the service of political analysis with an energy and a precision that neither the purely lyrical nor the purely analytical mode can achieve on its own. The capacity of great political poetry to do what prose political analysis cannot, to convey not only the intellectual content of a political argument but its emotional weight, its human cost, and its moral urgency, is something that Mazhar has demonstrated in poem after poem across his career.

But the deepest influences on Mazhar's poetry are neither European nor Latin American; they are Bengali and they are drawn from the specific philosophical and spiritual traditions of the Bengal delta. The influence of Lalon Shah is the most profound and the most far-reaching. Lalon's poetic method, which uses the imagery of the human body, of rivers and boats, of journey and arrival, of the relationship between the inner and the outer, the visible and the invisible, the known and the unknowable, to carry philosophical arguments of extraordinary depth and subtlety, has shaped Mazhar's own poetic practice in ways that go beyond the surface features of imagery and diction to affect the deepest structures of how he thinks and how he writes.

The philosophical significance of Lalon's poetry for Mazhar's intellectual project has been examined in Part One and Part Two of this textbook. But in the specific context of Mazhar's poetic practice, it is worth noting that the Lalon tradition offers something that neither European modernism nor Marxist political theory can provide: a model of how philosophical depth and popular accessibility can be achieved simultaneously, how the most demanding philosophical questions can be carried in forms that are not confined to the educated elite but are genuinely available to anyone who listens with care and attention. The Baul and Fakiri tradition has sustained this combination for centuries, and Mazhar's aspiration to achieve it in his own poetry, and in his prose writing as well, is one of the most important intellectual commitments of his career.

His published collections of poetry, spanning several decades and including works such as *Khun Dao Prokriti* (Give Blood to Nature), the poetry written during his period of political persecution, and the later collections that engage more explicitly with the constitutional and political crises of the contemporary period, represent a body of work that deserves serious literary-critical attention in its own right. The full critical analysis of that body of work is beyond the scope of the present textbook, which is primarily focused on Mazhar's philosophical and political thought. But it is important to note that the poetry is not merely a parallel production alongside the philosophical work; it is, in many cases, the place where the philosophical work reaches its deepest resolution, where the tensions that the prose argument holds in productive suspension are given their most complete and most emotionally and intellectually satisfying expression.

The relationship between poetry and political theory in Mazhar's work also raises important theoretical questions about the nature of philosophical knowledge and its relationship to aesthetic expression. The dominant tradition of Western analytical philosophy has, since at least Bertrand Russell and the logical positivists, maintained a sharp distinction between philosophical argument and aesthetic expression, treating the latter as emotive rather than cognitive, as a source of feeling rather than knowledge. The Continental philosophical tradition, from Heidegger through Derrida to the contemporary inheritors of that tradition, has been more receptive to the philosophical significance of literary and poetic form, but has tended to treat it through the lens of textual analysis rather than in the spirit of genuine engagement with specific literary traditions as sources of philosophical insight.

Mazhar's intellectual practice, informed as it is by the Bengali philosophical tradition's long history of philosophical poetry and poetic philosophy, offers an alternative model: one in which the distinction between philosophical argument and aesthetic expression is not abandoned but is understood as a permeable boundary rather than a wall, as a distinction within a continuous

intellectual practice rather than a separation between fundamentally different kinds of activity. This model, which has been developed independently in different ways by thinkers as different as Martha Nussbaum in her work on literature and the moral imagination, by Cornel West in his engagement with the blues tradition as a philosophical resource, and by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in his analysis of the relationship between African literary traditions and African political philosophy, represents one of the most important and most underdeveloped areas of contemporary intellectual inquiry, and Mazhar's work represents a significant contribution to it.

CHAPTER TWENTY: THE 2017 DISAPPEARANCE: STATE REPRESSION, POLITICAL PERSECUTION, AND THE PRICE OF DISSENT

The enforced disappearance of Farhad Mazhar in June 2017 is one of the most dramatic and most politically significant episodes in his personal history, and it provides a vivid illustration of the conditions of intellectual and political life in Bangladesh under the Hasina government and of the specific risks that a public intellectual of Mazhar's profile and independence faced in that political environment. The disappearance and its aftermath also raise important constitutional and jurisprudential questions that connect directly to the themes of his broader intellectual work: questions about habeas corpus, about the state's duty to account for individuals in its custody, about the use of enforced disappearance as a tool of political repression, and about the conditions under which the rule of law is effectively suspended for political dissidents.

In the early morning hours of June 4, 2017, Farhad Mazhar left his home in Dhaka and did not return. His family, when they discovered his absence, contacted the police and filed a missing persons report. The initial response of the police authorities was, characteristically, one of minimization and deflection: they suggested that the elderly intellectual might simply have gone somewhere without informing his family, that there was no immediate cause for concern, and that formal search procedures would be initiated in due course. This response, in the context of the pattern of enforced disappearances that had characterized the Hasina government's treatment of its critics, was received with considerable skepticism by Mazhar's family, associates, and the human rights community.

Reports of a ransom demand complicated the initial picture, introducing the possibility that the disappearance was a criminal rather than a political act. But the circumstances of the disappearance, including the absence of any indication that Mazhar had planned to go anywhere, the political profile of the missing person, and the pattern of enforced disappearances that had become one of the defining features of the Hasina government's repression of its critics, led many observers to conclude that the disappearance was either directly orchestrated by state security forces or facilitated by their deliberate inaction.

The response of the international intellectual community to the disappearance was substantial and significant. Letters of protest were signed by dozens of prominent international intellectuals and writers, demanding an account of Mazhar's whereabouts and an investigation into the circumstances of his disappearance. The names of those who signed included major figures in the international academic and literary world, demonstrating the extent of Mazhar's connections

with the global intellectual network and the degree to which his work was recognized and valued outside Bangladesh.

Mazhar was eventually found on a bus traveling from Khulna to Dhaka, approximately two days after his disappearance. The circumstances of how he came to be on that bus, where he had been in the intervening period, and what had happened to him during that time were never fully established. His own account of the disappearance was limited and, given the circumstances, understandably so: the experience of someone who has been subjected to the kind of political pressure and potential detention that the circumstances suggest had every reason to be cautious about what they said publicly. The official investigation into the disappearance produced no satisfactory account of what had happened, and the human rights organizations that documented the case noted that the handling of the investigation was consistent with the pattern of impunity that characterized the Hasina government's response to allegations of enforced disappearance.

The constitutional and legal dimensions of the 2017 disappearance are, from the perspective of the present textbook's analytical framework, of particular importance. The right to personal liberty and the protection against arbitrary detention are among the most fundamental guarantees of any constitutional order. Article 32 of the Bangladesh Constitution guarantees that no person shall be deprived of life or personal liberty save in accordance with law, and Article 33 provides constitutional protection against arrest and detention without specific charges. The writ of habeas corpus, the ancient common law remedy that compels any authority holding a person in custody to produce them before a court and to account for the legal basis of their detention, is the primary judicial mechanism through which these constitutional guarantees are enforced.

The pattern of enforced disappearances under the Hasina government, of which Mazhar's disappearance was one of the most prominent but far from the only instance, represented a systematic assault on these constitutional guarantees. The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), the elite police unit created in 2004 and subsequently implicated in dozens of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, had developed the practice of disappearances as a mechanism for removing political critics without the procedural constraints that formal arrest and prosecution would impose. The victims of enforced disappearance were either subsequently found dead, in which case their deaths were attributed to crossfire, the euphemism used by RAB for extrajudicial execution, or released without any official explanation of where they had been or what had been done to them.

The jurisprudential dimensions of this practice connect directly to the broader constitutional analysis that Mazhar has developed throughout his intellectual career. His argument that the constitutional guarantees of the 1972 constitution have been systematically hollowed out by the political manipulations of successive governments finds vivid confirmation in the practice of enforced disappearance. The practice demonstrates, in the most direct and brutal way, that the formal constitutional protections of personal liberty mean nothing in the absence of an independent judiciary, an accountable police force, and a political culture that treats constitutional rights as genuine constraints on state power rather than aspirational statements subject to emergency suspension.

The international legal framework for addressing enforced disappearances, particularly the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, which Bangladesh signed in 2007 but has not ratified, provides important context for evaluating the constitutional failure that the pattern of disappearances represents. The Convention defines enforced disappearance as the arrest, detention, abduction, or any other form of deprivation of liberty by agents of the state or by persons or groups of persons acting with the authorization, support, or acquiescence of the state, followed by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person. It identifies enforced disappearance as a crime against humanity when practiced as part of a systematic or widespread attack on a civilian population.

The connection between Mazhar's personal experience of the threats and pressures of intellectual life in Bangladesh under the Hasina government, including the 2017 disappearance, and his theoretical analysis of the structural conditions of Bangladeshi constitutionalism, is direct and philosophically significant. He is not an armchair theorist analyzing the failures of the constitutional order from the safety of a tenured academic position; he is a thinker who has lived the consequences of those failures in his own person and whose theoretical analysis is therefore grounded in a form of experiential knowledge that purely academic constitutional theory cannot access.

The 1995 arrest, mentioned in the Wikipedia documentation of his life and supported by the international letters of protest from Nadine Gordimer, Jacques Derrida, and Mahasweta Devi, represents an earlier instance of the same pattern of state repression. The fact that three of the most distinguished intellectual figures of the late twentieth century, a Nobel Prize-winning novelist, one of the most important philosophers of deconstruction, and one of the most powerful voices of Bengali literature and social commitment, joined together to demand Mazhar's release demonstrates both the international significance of his intellectual profile and the recognition by the international intellectual community that the repression he faced was a matter of legitimate concern for all those committed to the freedom of intellectual inquiry and expression.

The theoretical implications of political repression for intellectual work are explored in a rich literature on the sociology of knowledge under conditions of political constraint. The work of Merton Brodsky on intellectuals and dissent, of Michael Walzer on the political responsibilities of intellectuals, and of more recent scholars like Corey Robin on the fear and the courage involved in radical intellectual practice, all illuminate the specific conditions under which Mazhar has conducted his intellectual work. The literature on what Antonio Gramsci called the organic intellectual, the intellectual whose work is organically connected to the struggles of a specific social class or political movement, is also relevant: Mazhar's intellectual practice represents a distinctive variation on the Gramscian model, one in which the organic intellectual is connected not to a single class or movement but to the broader democratic aspirations of a people whose political institutions have consistently failed to honor those aspirations.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: GONO-OVYUTTHAN O GATHAN: THE BOOK THAT SHAPED A REVOLUTION

The publication of Farhad Mazhar's book *Gono-Ovyutthan o Gathan* (Mass Uprising and Constitution) in 2023 represents one of the most remarkable instances of a theoretical text exercising direct influence on a political uprising in the recent history of South Asia. The book, which synthesizes several decades of Mazhar's thinking about constituent power, popular sovereignty, and the constitutional transformation of Bangladesh, became required reading for the student leaders who organized and led the mass uprising of July and August 2024, and its conceptual framework provided much of the intellectual scaffolding for the political demands and the constitutional vision of the uprising.

To understand the significance of this development, it is necessary first to understand what the book argues and why its arguments proved so resonant with the student movement that overthrew the Hasina government. The book's central argument is organized around a distinction between two fundamentally different understandings of what happens in a mass uprising. The first understanding, which Mazhar attributes to the conventional political analysis of both the liberal and the orthodox left traditions, treats a mass uprising as a political event that leads to a change of government, after which the constitutional and institutional framework of the state remains essentially intact and the new government inherits the powers and the legitimacy of the old one within that unchanged framework. This understanding was, Mazhar argues, the understanding that shaped the responses to the 1969 uprising, the 1990 uprising, and the various other moments of popular political mobilization in Bangladeshi history, with the consistent result that the structural conditions that generated the initial uprising were reproduced under new political management.

The second understanding, which Mazhar develops through his engagement with the theory of constituent power, treats a mass uprising as a manifestation of the constituent power of the people, a moment in which the sovereign people assert their fundamental right to constitute or reconstitute their political order from the ground up. This understanding requires a fundamental distinction between the constituent power, the power of the people to give themselves a new constitutional order, and the constituted powers, the government, the legislature, the judiciary, and the other institutions established by and operating within an existing constitutional framework. When a mass uprising manifests the constituent power, Mazhar argues, it does not merely change the occupants of the constituted powers; it calls into question the legitimacy of the constituted powers themselves and demands their reconstitution on new foundations.

This theoretical framework, which draws on the tradition of constitutional thought running from Sieyes through Schmitt and Arendt to the contemporary theorists of constituent power, is not merely an abstract philosophical argument; it has direct and practical consequences for the political demands that a mass uprising can coherently make and for the institutional processes through which those demands can be met. If a mass uprising is understood merely as a change of government, then the appropriate institutional response is an election, which will install a new government within the existing constitutional framework. But if a mass uprising is understood as a manifestation of constituent power, then the appropriate institutional response is a constituent assembly process, through which the people can exercise their constituent power to create a genuinely new constitutional order.

The practical political implication of this theoretical distinction was, in the context of the 2023 publication and the approaching political crisis, of extraordinary importance. The conventional opposition political parties in Bangladesh, including the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), had consistently framed their political demands in terms of the first understanding: they wanted free and fair elections, they wanted the installation of a neutral caretaker government to oversee those elections, and they wanted to compete for power within the existing constitutional framework. Mazhar's book argued that this framework of demands was fundamentally inadequate to the depth of the constitutional crisis facing Bangladesh, that free and fair elections within the existing constitutional framework could not address the structural conditions that had made the Hasina government's authoritarian transformation possible, and that genuine political transformation required the much more radical step of convening a constituent assembly to create a genuinely new constitutional order.

The argument of the book connects to several currents of contemporary political theory that have been particularly influential in the post-2008 global political environment. The experiences of the Arab Spring uprisings, of the Latin American left-populist constitutional experiments, of the Occupy movements in the United States and Europe, and of the various democratic renewal movements in Eastern Europe and elsewhere had generated, by the early 2020s, a substantial body of theoretical reflection on the conditions under which popular uprisings can produce genuine democratic transformation rather than merely changing the personnel of authoritarian governance. This literature, which includes the work of scholars like Chantal Mouffe on agonistic democracy, of Paolo Gerbaudo on the digital party and populist mobilization, of Tariq Ali on the new dispensation in left politics, and of the Latin American theorists of twenty-first century socialism, provided important theoretical context for the arguments of Gono-Ovyutthan o Gathan, even though the book is firmly rooted in the specific conditions of Bangladeshi political life.

The reception of the book among the student activists who would go on to lead the 2024 uprising is documented in several sources, including interviews with key figures of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement conducted in the period after the uprising. These accounts consistently identify Mazhar's book as one of the key intellectual resources that shaped their understanding of what they were doing and what they were trying to achieve. The concept of constituent power, which the book presents with both theoretical rigor and accessible clarity, provided a framework through which the student leaders could understand the uprising not merely as a protest against a specific government but as an exercise of the fundamental democratic right of the people to constitute their own political order.

This distinction had practical political consequences. When the Hasina government fell and the question of what should follow arose, the student leaders who had absorbed the framework of Gono-Ovyutthan o Gathan were in a position to articulate demands that went beyond the conventional opposition's call for elections. They demanded not merely a new government but a new constitutional order, not merely the removal of a specific ruler but the fundamental transformation of the political system that had made that ruler's authoritarian transformation possible. The demand for a constituent assembly, which became one of the central political demands of the post-uprising period and which Mazhar championed with characteristic

persistence in his public interventions throughout 2024 and into 2025, had been theoretically grounded in the arguments of the book published a year before the uprising.

The chapter structure of *Gono-Ovyutthan o Gathan* reflects the systematic character of Mazhar's argument. The book opens with a philosophical analysis of the concept of uprising itself, drawing on a comparative examination of the history of mass political mobilizations from the French Revolution to the Arab Spring to analyze the conditions under which a popular uprising can constitute a genuine exercise of constituent power rather than merely a political rebellion that changes the personnel of governance without transforming its structure. It proceeds to a detailed analysis of the history of constituent power in Bangladesh, examining why the country has never had a genuine constituent assembly process, tracing this absence to the specific conditions of its emergence as a state in 1971 and to the constitutional choices made in 1972, and arguing that this historical lack is one of the deepest structural conditions of the constitutional pathologies that have afflicted Bangladesh since independence.

The book then develops Mazhar's positive vision of constituent power and its institutional requirements, arguing that a genuine constituent assembly must be organized in a way that gives voice to the diversity of the Bangladeshi people, including the communities that have been systematically marginalized by the existing political order. It addresses the specific challenges of timing and sequencing in constituent processes, examining the comparative experience of other countries that have undergone fundamental constitutional transformation and drawing lessons from both the successes and the failures of those experiences. And it concludes with a discussion of the political conditions, including the role of the student movement, the women's movement, the movement for the rights of indigenous peoples, and the labor movement, that must be cultivated and strengthened if a genuine constituent process is to be possible in Bangladesh.

The book's philosophical method is characteristic of Mazhar's mature intellectual practice. It moves with unusual fluency between the abstract level of constitutional theory, drawing on the work of Sieyes, Schmitt, Arendt, and their contemporary successors, and the concrete level of Bangladeshi political history, demonstrating how the theoretical framework illuminates the specific historical conditions and how the historical conditions test and refine the theoretical framework. It deploys the resources of postcolonial theory to analyze the specifically colonial dimensions of Bangladesh's constitutional history without reducing the analysis to a merely postcolonial framework. And it engages with the religious and cultural dimensions of Bangladeshi political life with the characteristic openness that distinguishes Mazhar's approach from both the secular nationalist tradition and the Islamist tradition, arguing that genuine democratic sovereignty must be grounded in the actual values and commitments of the Bengali people as they have been shaped by their historical experience, including their religious and cultural experience.

The most philosophically distinctive section of the book is its treatment of what Mazhar calls the problem of political self-consciousness. He argues that a mass uprising cannot translate its energy into genuine constituent power unless it is accompanied by the development of a form of political self-consciousness through which the participants in the uprising understand themselves not merely as protesters against a specific injustice but as bearers of the constituent power of the sovereign people. This requires, he argues, forms of political education and intellectual

formation that the conventional political institutions and the conventional political opposition have consistently failed to provide, and that are the specific responsibility of the public intellectual, the role that Mazhar has been playing throughout his career and that the book itself is an attempt to discharge.

The theoretical debate that Gono-Ovyutthan o Gathan engages in and contributes to is not confined to Bangladesh. The question of what conditions must be met for a popular uprising to constitute genuine democratic transformation is one of the central questions of contemporary democratic theory, and the Bangladeshi experience of 2024, shaped in part by Mazhar's book, has become an important case study in the global academic literature on democratic transitions and constitutional change. The work of scholars at the Center for Constitutional Transitions at New York University School of Law, the research of the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law on constitution-making in transitional contexts, and the ongoing comparative work of scholars at the Comparative Constitutions Project at the University of Illinois all engage with the questions that Mazhar's book addresses, and several of these scholars have engaged specifically with the Bangladeshi case in the post-2024 period.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: THE JULY 2024 UPRISING: INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCE, CONSTITUENT POWER IN PRACTICE

The mass uprising of July and August 2024 that overthrew the government of Sheikh Hasina after fifteen years of increasingly authoritarian rule represents the most dramatic and the most politically consequential event in Bangladesh's history since the liberation war of 1971. The uprising, which began as a student protest against a discriminatory quota system in government employment and rapidly expanded into a mass movement demanding the removal of the government, resulted in the flight of Sheikh Hasina from Bangladesh on August 5, 2024, and the installation of an interim government under the leadership of Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus. The human cost of the uprising was enormous: more than three hundred people were killed by security forces during the weeks of protest, and thousands more were injured.

The relationship between the uprising and Farhad Mazhar's intellectual work is complex and multi-dimensional, and any simple account of his influence on the events of 2024 would be an oversimplification. The uprising was not planned or organized by any single intellectual figure, and its causes and dynamics were shaped by a vast array of structural, political, and contingent factors that no single intellectual framework can fully explain. Nevertheless, the specific intellectual contribution of Mazhar to the formation of the political consciousness that animated the uprising's leadership, and to the constitutional framework through which the uprising's participants understood their political project, is documented in sufficient detail to be treated as a significant historical fact rather than merely an interpretive claim.

The starting point for understanding Mazhar's intellectual influence on the 2024 uprising is the documented role of Gono-Ovyutthan o Gathan in shaping the thinking of the student leaders who organized the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement (ADSM). Multiple key figures of the

ADSM have, in interviews conducted in the post-uprising period, identified Mazhar's book as a significant influence on their political thinking. The concept of constituent power, which the book made accessible to a student audience without sacrificing its theoretical depth, provided a framework through which the student leaders could understand the political significance of what they were doing that went beyond the conventional language of protest politics and political opposition.

The influence of Mazhar's analysis extended beyond his book to include his sustained public commentary in the years and months leading up to the uprising. His interventions in Chinta and in various digital media platforms had consistently argued, in the two years before the uprising, that the political crisis facing Bangladesh was not simply a matter of electoral manipulation and human rights violations, serious as these were, but was a constitutional crisis of the deepest kind, a crisis in which the very conditions of genuine popular sovereignty had been systematically destroyed by the Hasina government's manipulation of the constitutional order.

This analysis provided a framework through which the student activists could understand their own movement as something more than a protest against a specific policy decision, the quota system that had initially triggered the protests, and as something more politically significant than the conventional opposition parties' demand for electoral fairness. The ADSM's demands, as they developed during the weeks of the uprising, reflected this understanding: they escalated from demands about the quota system to demands about the political system as a whole, from demands for policy reform to demands for the removal of the government, and from demands for new elections to demands for a genuinely new constitutional order. This escalation, while shaped by the dynamics of the movement itself and by the government's brutal response to the initial protests, also reflected a theoretical framework that had been cultivated by Mazhar's intellectual work.

The digital dimension of Mazhar's influence on the 2024 uprising deserves particular attention. The growth of Bangladeshi digital media in the decade before the uprising had created new channels for the circulation of political and intellectual content that bypassed the conventional media gatekeepers. YouTube channels, Facebook pages, and online platforms including the one operated by bdnews24.com, had provided venues for Mazhar's public lectures, interviews, and commentaries to reach audiences far larger than those accessible through the print circulation of Chinta. The viral circulation of his analyses on social media platforms, shared by young activists who found in his framework a way of articulating their political frustrations that conventional political analysis failed to provide, represents a new mode of intellectual influence that the sociology of knowledge is only beginning to analyze systematically.

The theoretical framework that Mazhar had developed, and that the uprising's leadership absorbed, also shaped the specific form of political demands that emerged after the government's fall. The demand for a constituent assembly, rather than simply for new elections, the demand for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the insistence that the interim government's task was not merely to manage a transition to new elections within the existing constitutional framework but to facilitate a fundamental constitutional transformation, all reflected the framework of constituent power theory that Mazhar had been developing and disseminating for decades.

In the immediate aftermath of the uprising, Mazhar was among the most prominent and the most active voices calling for the full realization of the uprising's constitutional potential. In a series of public statements, interviews, and lectures in August and September 2024, he consistently argued that the removal of the Hasina government was a necessary but insufficient condition for genuine democratic transformation, that the interim government's first responsibility was to create the conditions for a genuine constituent assembly process, and that the failure to pursue this path would result in the kind of constitutional counter-revolution that had followed every previous popular uprising in Bangladesh's history.

His interview with The Daily Star, published in late September 2024, is one of the most important documents of his post-uprising intellectual activity. In that interview, he articulated with characteristic precision the theoretical framework through which he analyzed the relationship between the 2024 uprising and its predecessors, arguing that the 1969 uprising had been about political and economic autonomy within the Pakistani state, that the 1990 uprising had been about the restoration of formal electoral democracy within the existing constitutional framework, but that the 2024 uprising was fundamentally different because it was centered around the question of state-building based on popular sovereignty. This distinction, which reflects the theoretical framework of Gono-Ovyutthan o Gathan, provided the analytical foundation for his specific constitutional demands in the post-uprising period.

The complex and contested relationship between Mazhar and the interim government of Muhammad Yunus deserves extended analysis. Yunus, whose appointment as head of the interim government was demanded by the student leaders of the uprising and who was broadly welcomed by the international community, represented a very different political tradition from Mazhar's radical constituent power theory. Yunus's intellectual framework, shaped by his work in microfinance and social entrepreneurship, is fundamentally reformist rather than transformative: it seeks to improve the functioning of the existing economic and political system rather than to replace it with a fundamentally different order. The tension between this reformist orientation and Mazhar's transformative constitutional vision was visible in the post-uprising period and shaped Mazhar's increasingly critical commentary on the direction of the interim government.

Mazhar's statement, documented in the bdnews24.com reporting, that Yunus's approach was misguided because the constituent assembly process could not be decided in consultation with political parties, reflected this tension. His argument was that the constituent assembly process must be driven by the constituent power of the people, as expressed through the uprising and the organizations that led it, rather than through the conventional mechanisms of party negotiation that reproduce the political structures the uprising had challenged. This is a theoretically consistent position, grounded in the distinction between constituent and constituted power that his book had developed, but it is also a politically contentious one that placed him in conflict with both the interim government and the conventional opposition parties.

The comparison that Mazhar drew, in his Daily Star interview, between the post-uprising constitutional moment and the South African post-apartheid experience, including the recommendation for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, is theoretically significant and deserves extended analysis. The South African constitutional experience of the 1990s, in which a

genuinely inclusive constituent assembly process produced one of the most celebrated constitutions of the late twentieth century, has been widely studied as a model of successful democratic constitutional transformation. Mazhar's invocation of the South African precedent reflects both his deep familiarity with the comparative constitutional literature and his conviction that the Bangladeshi post-uprising moment represented a genuinely comparable opportunity for constitutional transformation that must not be squandered.

The theoretical analysis of why constituent assembly processes sometimes succeed and sometimes fail is a rich area of contemporary constitutional scholarship, and several of the most important contributions to that literature are directly relevant to the Bangladeshi situation that Mazhar was analyzing. The work of Jon Elster on the mechanics of constitution-making, of Zaid Al-Ali and Deval Desai on constitution-making in post-conflict societies, and of the more recent scholarship on the conditions of constitutional success in transitional contexts, including the analysis of successes and failures in the Arab Spring constitutions, all provide comparative context for evaluating Mazhar's constitutional proposals and the specific challenges they face in the Bangladeshi political environment.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: THE INCOMPLETE REVOLUTION: POST-UPRISING CONTROVERSIES AND ONGOING INTERVENTIONS

The period from August 2024 to the present, the period that Mazhar has described as the aftermath of an incomplete revolution, has been one of the most intellectually and politically active of his career. At an age when many public intellectuals have retreated from the front lines of political engagement to the calmer waters of historical reflection and theoretical consolidation, Mazhar has continued to intervene with characteristic urgency and characteristic provocation in the evolving constitutional and political situation in Bangladesh. His interventions in this period illuminate the deepest commitments of his intellectual project and also reveal, with unusual clarity, the tensions and contradictions inherent in the position of a radical public intellectual who has helped to generate a political transformation whose subsequent direction he finds deeply inadequate.

The December 2024 lecture at the Bangla Academy, one of the most important public intellectual events in Bangladesh in the immediate post-uprising period, provides a vivid illustration of these tensions. In this lecture, organized to mark Victory Day and therefore invested with particular symbolic significance, Mazhar argued with striking directness that the mass uprising of 2024 had failed in its fundamental purpose. His statement that the uprising remained incomplete, that it had not led to the direction he had hoped, and that the layers of half-obscure thinking that the uprising needed to shatter had not in fact been shattered, represents an unusual and characteristically honest form of critical self-assessment: the assessment of a public intellectual who had invested decades of intellectual work in preparing for a moment of political transformation and who finds that the transformation, when it comes, falls short of what the moment required.

The diagnosis of incompleteness that Mazhar offers is both a political and a philosophical one. Politically, the incompleteness refers to the failure to convene a genuine constituent assembly process, the failure to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the failure to implement the constitutional changes that the uprising had demanded, and the tendency of the interim government to operate within the existing constitutional framework rather than challenging it. These political failures are, in Mazhar's analysis, symptoms of a deeper philosophical failure: the failure to transform the political consciousness of the broader population, to break through the ideological frameworks that had been produced and reproduced by decades of authoritarian governance and that continued to shape the way most Bangladeshis thought about politics, the state, and their own political agency.

The concept of half-obscure thinking that Mazhar uses in the Bangla Academy lecture is a philosophical concept of some depth and deserves analysis. It refers to a condition of political consciousness in which the frameworks of the old order have been partially but not completely disrupted, in which people are aware that something has changed and that the old certainties no longer hold, but have not yet developed the new conceptual frameworks that would allow them to fully understand and act on the transformation that the uprising represents. This condition is, in Mazhar's analysis, both psychologically understandable and politically dangerous: psychologically understandable because the development of new conceptual frameworks requires time and intellectual work that the pace of political events does not always permit, and politically dangerous because the ambiguity of half-obscure thinking creates the conditions in which the forces of restoration can operate, offering the apparent stability of familiar political structures to people who have not yet developed the confidence in the alternative that genuine transformation requires.

The concept of half-obscure thinking connects to several theoretical traditions that have analyzed the conditions of political consciousness in moments of revolutionary transformation. Walter Benjamin's analysis of revolutionary time, in which the lightning flash of the revolutionary moment must be seized before the forces of restoration can reassert themselves, is relevant here. So is Gramsci's analysis of the interregnum, the period between the death of the old order and the birth of the new, in which a variety of morbid symptoms can appear as different social forces compete to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of the old hegemony. And so is the psychoanalytic tradition's analysis of the difficulties of mourning and transition, the resistance to fully letting go of old structures of meaning even when those structures have demonstrably failed, a resistance that can generate the kinds of political regression and restoration that Mazhar describes.

The emergence of what Mazhar calls religious fascism in the post-uprising period represents, for him, the most dangerous form of this political regression. His statement at the November 2025 protest rally outside the National Press Club, in the context of the arrest of Baul singer Abul Sarkar Moharaj, that a new form of religious nationalism amounting to religious fascism was emerging in Bangladesh, and that its rise had begun after August 5, 2024 with the desecration of mazar shrines, represents a significant development in his political analysis with important theoretical implications.

The concept of religious fascism that Mazhar employs is not a mere political label; it is a theoretical category that he has developed with considerable philosophical care. His statement in the bdnews24.com discussion program Inside Out that fascism must be distinguished in three forms, as ideology, as organized political and social force, and as institutionalized constitutional power, and that the secular nationalism of the Awami League and the religious nationalism of certain post-uprising forces represent two sides of the same fascist coin, reflects a theoretical analysis of fascism that goes beyond the conventional usage of the term as a general denunciation of authoritarian politics.

Mazhar's theoretical analysis of fascism draws on several important traditions in the academic literature on the subject. The classical Marxist analysis of fascism, from the work of Clara Zetkin and Georgi Dimitrov in the 1930s through the more sophisticated analyses of Max Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School, treats fascism as a specific political form that emerges under conditions of capitalist crisis when the ruling class needs a mass movement to defeat the threat of socialist transformation. The more recent scholarship on fascism, including the work of Robert Paxton, Roger Griffin, and Umberto Eco, has developed more complex analyses that attend to the specifically ideological and cultural dimensions of fascist politics, including its appeal to national mythology, its aestheticization of violence, and its construction of an enemy that must be destroyed in order for the nation to be reborn.

Mazhar's analysis of Bangladesh's post-uprising political situation deploys both of these theoretical traditions. He identifies in the religious nationalism that is emerging in the post-uprising period the same appeal to mythological national identity, the same construction of an internal enemy, and the same aestheticization of communal violence that characterize fascist politics in its classical forms. But he also identifies the specific Bengali and Bangladeshi dimensions of this phenomenon, including the specific historical relationship between Bengali Muslim identity and the regional traditions of syncretic religious culture that religious nationalism threatens to destroy.

The arrest of Baul singer Abul Sarkar Moharaj on charges of hurting religious sentiments, and the broader pattern of attacks on Baul singers, mazar shrines, and other manifestations of the syncretic religious culture of the Bengal delta that had been occurring in the post-uprising period, provided the immediate context for Mazhar's November 2025 rally speech. But the speech connected this immediate context to a much broader theoretical analysis of the relationship between the Baul and Fakiri tradition and the conditions of genuine democratic culture in Bangladesh, an analysis that runs throughout Mazhar's intellectual career.

The Baul and Fakiri tradition, as Mazhar has argued in many contexts, is not merely a folk culture or a minority religious practice; it is a philosophical tradition of the first order, a tradition that has developed, over many centuries, one of the most profound and most consistent critiques of religious orthodoxy, political authority, and the forms of social domination that claim religious justification. The tradition's insistence on the primacy of individual spiritual experience over collective religious authority, its practice of solidarity across the boundaries of caste and community, and its celebration of the divine in the ordinary materiality of human life, are not merely theological positions; they are a philosophical tradition of democracy and of human

dignity that represents one of the most important intellectual resources available to Bangladesh in its current political crisis.

The threat to this tradition from religious nationalism is therefore, in Mazhar's analysis, not merely a threat to a specific cultural practice but a threat to one of the deep sources of the democratic political culture that genuine constitutional transformation requires. His insistence, in the face of death threats and smear campaigns that he acknowledged at the November 2025 rally, on continuing to defend the Baul tradition and the broader culture of religious pluralism and individual spiritual freedom that it represents, reflects the deepest commitments of his intellectual and personal life.

His statement at the rally, that if killing him would establish Islam in Bangladesh then he would accept that sacrifice, deserves to be read not merely as political bravado but as a philosophical statement. It reflects the same parrhesiastic commitment to frank speech, to speaking the truth regardless of personal consequences, that has characterized his intellectual practice throughout his career. And it connects to the deepest resources of the Bengali philosophical tradition, in which the willingness to sacrifice the body for the truth of the spirit is a recurring theme from the Baul songs to the Vaishnava devotional literature.

The tension between Mazhar's continued commitment to the fundamental transformative demands of the uprising and his critical assessment of the direction that the post-uprising political process has taken creates a complex and theoretically important political position. He is simultaneously the intellectual godfather of the uprising, the thinker whose framework provided the theoretical foundation for its constitutional demands, and one of the most consistent critics of the way the post-uprising political process has developed, arguing that the uprising remains incomplete, that the constitutional transformation it demanded has not been achieved, and that new forms of political danger are emerging in the space that the incomplete transformation has left open.

This position, of the critical friend who celebrates the achievement while insisting on the insufficiency of what has been achieved, is one of the most difficult and most important positions available to the public intellectual in a moment of political transformation. It requires the intellectual courage to refuse the temptation of triumphalism, the invitation to declare victory and align oneself with the new power, without falling into the equally tempting posture of permanent oppositional criticism that refuses to acknowledge any genuine political progress. Mazhar's navigation of this difficult position, while not perfect or without contradictions, represents one of the most politically sophisticated intellectual stances available in the complex and rapidly evolving post-uprising political landscape of Bangladesh.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: GLOBAL INTELLECTUAL NETWORKS AND THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF MAZHAR'S THOUGHT

The narrative of Farhad Mazhar as a Bangladeshi thinker addressing Bangladeshi problems for a primarily Bangladeshi audience, while not entirely inaccurate, fails to capture the full dimensions

of his intellectual project and his intellectual biography. He is, in fact, a thinker who has operated throughout his career at the intersection of multiple international intellectual networks, who has contributed to and drawn from theoretical debates that are genuinely global in their scope, and whose specific Bengali and Bangladeshi intellectual project has significant implications for theoretical debates that are being conducted well beyond the borders of Bangladesh.

The most significant of these international intellectual connections is the relationship with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, one of the most important living theorists of postcolonial thought and one of the most influential literary and cultural critics of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Spivak's acknowledgment of Mazhar in her 2012 Kyoto Prize lecture, in which she describes him as the person who introduced her to the practitioners of the devotional school of Lalon Shah Fakir and credits him with giving her the intellectual gift of Lalon, is not merely a biographical courtesy; it is an intellectual acknowledgment of extraordinary significance.

The nature of the intellectual exchange between Mazhar and Spivak illuminates several important dimensions of Mazhar's intellectual project. Spivak's work, particularly her translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* and her foundational essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, has been central to the development of postcolonial theory as an academic discipline. Her engagement with Mazhar, and specifically with the philosophical tradition of Lalon that he introduced her to, represents one of the pathways through which the philosophical resources of the Bengal delta have entered the international academic conversation about postcolonial thought.

The theoretical contribution of Lalon's tradition to postcolonial theory, as mediated through the Mazhar-Spivak intellectual exchange, is philosophically significant. Lalon's philosophical practice, which refuses the binary between the religious and the secular, between the body and the spirit, between the self and the other, and which develops a mode of philosophical inquiry grounded in the concrete, embodied experience of the individual rather than in the abstractions of systematic theology or political philosophy, provides resources that postcolonial theory, with its sophisticated analysis of colonial discourse and its productive engagement with psychoanalytic theory, has found useful and illuminating.

The connection between Mazhar and the international network of critical theory scholars associated with the Frankfurt School tradition, cultivated during his years at the New School for Social Research, has been another important international intellectual relationship throughout his career. The New School's tradition of engagement with critical theory, with its synthesis of Marxist political economy, Hegelian philosophy, and psychoanalytic theory, provided Mazhar with the theoretical framework that he subsequently brought into dialogue with the indigenous intellectual traditions of Bengal. This dialogue, which produces the distinctive synthesis of Mazhar's mature thought, is itself a significant contribution to the international project of developing critical theory that is adequate to the specific conditions of postcolonial societies.

The international dimension of Mazhar's agricultural and ecological work, conducted through UBINIG and the Nayakrishi Andolon, has connected him to one of the most important global intellectual networks of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century: the movement for food sovereignty, seed rights, and ecological agriculture. This movement, which has developed theoretical frameworks and practical alternatives to the industrial agricultural model promoted by

the international development establishment, represents a global intellectual and political project of significant importance, and Mazhar's contributions to it, through his theoretical analysis of the epistemological and political dimensions of peasant knowledge systems, have been recognized and engaged with by scholars and activists across the world.

The relationship between Mazhar's intellectual work and the international human rights movement is another important dimension of his global intellectual connections. His 1995 arrest and the subsequent international campaign for his release, supported by figures of the stature of Nadine Gordimer and Jacques Derrida, connected him to the international network of intellectuals and human rights advocates who have consistently defended the freedom of intellectual expression and political dissent against the repressive practices of authoritarian governments. This connection has both a personal and a political dimension: personally, it provided Mazhar with forms of protection and solidarity that those without international recognition cannot access, and politically, it demonstrated that the defense of intellectual freedom and political dissent in Bangladesh is a matter of legitimate concern for the international human rights community.

The relationship between the Bangladeshi constitutional crisis of 2024 and the global debate about democratic backsliding represents the most recent and in many ways the most significant international dimension of Mazhar's intellectual project. The comparative literature on democratic erosion and constitutional resilience, developed primarily by scholars at American and European universities but with increasing engagement from scholars in the global south, has found in the Bangladeshi experience of both authoritarian regression and popular democratic resistance a case study of considerable theoretical interest. Mazhar's constitutional analysis, with its sophisticated engagement with the theory of constituent power and its grounded analysis of the specific conditions of Bangladeshi constitutionalism, has become part of this international conversation, cited and engaged with by scholars who are developing the theoretical frameworks for understanding how genuine democratic transformation can be achieved in societies that have experienced deep democratic erosion.

The theoretical debate about the relationship between popular sovereignty and democratic constitutionalism that is at the center of Mazhar's constitutional work is one of the most active areas of contemporary political philosophy. The work of Claude Lefort on democracy and political form, of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe on hegemony and socialist strategy, of Jurgen Habermas on between facts and norms, and of the more recent generation of democratic theorists including Wendy Brown on the paradoxes of democracy, Sheldon Wolin on democracy and the counter-democratic, and Bonnie Honig on emergency politics and public protest, all engage with the questions that Mazhar's constitutional theory addresses, and his contribution to this debate is the specific contribution of someone who has lived the questions he is theorizing, who has developed his theoretical framework under conditions of genuine political urgency, and whose intellectual project is rooted in a specific cultural and philosophical tradition that the predominantly Euro-American academic debate has insufficiently engaged with.

The most recent developments in global political theory that are relevant to Mazhar's intellectual project include the growing literature on decolonial thought, associated with scholars like Anibal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, which analyzes the long-term

intellectual consequences of colonial domination and develops frameworks for what it calls the decolonization of knowledge. This tradition has significant resonances with Mazhar's own project, particularly in its critique of the pretension of Western epistemology to universal validity and its insistence on the philosophical significance of knowledge traditions that have been marginalized by colonial domination. But Mazhar's relationship to the decolonial tradition is, characteristically, neither one of simple adoption nor one of simple rejection; it is a relationship of critical engagement in which the decolonial critique is both affirmed and complicated by the specific conditions of the Bengali philosophical tradition and the specific forms of intellectual and political resistance that that tradition has generated.

The 2024 and 2025 literature on radical democratic theory, including the response to the wave of popular uprisings that swept through various parts of the world in the years around 2024, has found in the Bangladeshi case a particularly instructive example of both the possibilities and the limitations of popular democratic mobilization in contemporary political conditions. The comparative analysis of the Bangladeshi uprising alongside the earlier uprisings in Sudan, Chile, and Lebanon, and alongside the more recent movements in various other countries, is beginning to generate a comparative literature that will require engagement with the specific theoretical frameworks through which each of these uprisings understood and articulated its political demands. Mazhar's constituent power framework, which gave the Bangladeshi uprising a distinctive and theoretically sophisticated political language, is one of the most interesting contributions to this emerging comparative conversation.

The relationship between Mazhar's intellectual project and the emerging field of comparative political philosophy in the global south is also relevant here. The growing recognition, within the academic disciplines of political philosophy and political theory, that the philosophical traditions of the non-Western world represent genuine resources for political thought that go beyond the function of mere case studies for Western theoretical frameworks, is generating a new literature on comparative political philosophy that is directly relevant to the significance and the reception of Mazhar's work. The philosophical resources of the Bengal delta, including the Baul and Fakiri tradition, the Vaishnava philosophical tradition, and the syncretic religious culture of the delta, which Mazhar has spent his career excavating and articulating, represent precisely the kind of intellectual resources that this emerging comparative conversation needs.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: THE THEORY OF THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL AND MAZHAR'S CONTRIBUTION TO IT

Any comprehensive account of Farhad Mazhar's intellectual career must, at some point, step back from the details of his specific contributions and interventions and ask what his career, as a whole, contributes to the theoretical understanding of what a public intellectual is, what they can achieve, and what conditions are necessary for their work to be effective. This is not merely a question of intellectual biography; it is a question of political philosophy and democratic theory, a question about the conditions under which critical thought can make a genuine contribution to democratic political life.

The theory of the public intellectual has been developed in a rich literature that begins, in its modern form, with Max Weber's distinction between the scientist and the politician, with his analysis of the responsibilities of the intellectual under modern conditions, and with the concept of the intellectual as critic that runs through the work of Gramsci, Sartre, and the Frankfurt School. The more recent contributions to this literature include Edward Said's study of intellectual responsibility in *Representations of the Intellectual*, Russell Jacoby's analysis of the decline of public intellectual culture in *The Last Intellectuals*, and the various responses to Jacoby's analysis that have attempted to identify new forms of intellectual engagement adequate to the specific conditions of contemporary democratic life.

Said's analysis is particularly relevant to understanding Mazhar's intellectual practice. Said's model of the intellectual is organized around the concept of exile, not necessarily literal geographical exile, though Said himself was a Palestinian exile in America, but a form of intellectual exile that involves the maintenance of a critical distance from all institutional power and all ideological accommodation. The exiled intellectual, in Said's analysis, speaks from the margins, refuses the comfort of belonging, and maintains the capacity for critical analysis precisely because they have not sold their intellectual freedom for the security of institutional affiliation and social acceptance.

Mazhar's intellectual biography fits this model with remarkable precision. His literal exile in New York during the 1970s and 1980s was the institutional form of a broader intellectual exile that has characterized his entire career: the refusal to align with any of the powerful institutional actors in Bangladeshi political life that might have offered material support and social recognition in exchange for intellectual accommodation. His consistent maintenance of critical distance from both the ruling parties and the conventional opposition, from the secular nationalist tradition and the Islamist tradition, from the developmentalist state and the orthodox left, is precisely the form of intellectual exile that Said describes.

But Mazhar's model of the public intellectual differs from Said's in one important respect: it is more firmly rooted in specific cultural and philosophical traditions, in the specific traditions of the Bengal delta, than Said's model of the cosmopolitan exile allows for. Said's intellectual model, shaped by his own experience as a Palestinian intellectual in America, tends toward a kind of universal humanism that, while intellectually generous, tends to undervalue the specific philosophical resources of particular cultural traditions. Mazhar's model, by contrast, insists that genuine critical thought must be rooted in the specific cultural and philosophical traditions of the people whose political life it is concerned with, because those traditions carry forms of insight and forms of political imagination that the universalizing frameworks of Western theory cannot provide.

This difference reflects a broader theoretical debate within postcolonial theory between the cosmopolitan universalism associated with Said and the tradition-based particularism associated with thinkers like Ashis Nandy, who argues that the recovery and reaffirmation of indigenous intellectual traditions is a necessary part of the decolonization of thought and politics. Mazhar's position, as we have seen throughout this textbook, is not simply on one side of this debate; it is a sophisticated attempt to navigate between universalism and particularism, to develop a form of

thinking that is both rooted in the specific traditions of Bangladesh and genuinely engaged with the universal questions that those traditions address.

The contribution that Mazhar's career makes to the theory of the public intellectual is, therefore, the demonstration of the possibility of a form of public intellectual practice that combines theoretical seriousness with political urgency, rootedness in specific cultural traditions with engagement with universal questions, institutional independence with sustained political effectiveness, and the practice of frank speech at personal risk with the intellectual generosity that genuine dialogue requires. Whether he has fully realized this possibility, whether his specific interventions have been as effective and as philosophically consistent as his vision of public intellectual practice requires, are questions that admit of legitimate debate. But the vision itself, articulated through his career as a whole, represents one of the most important contributions that Bangladeshi intellectual life has made to the global theory of what a public intellectual can be and do.

The most recent developments in the theory of the public intellectual, reflecting the changed conditions of the digital media environment, are directly relevant to evaluating Mazhar's contemporary practice. The work of scholars like Andrew Chadwick on hybrid media systems, of Zizi Papacharissi on affective publics, and of Axel Bruns on gatwatching and the changing dynamics of the public sphere all illuminate the specific opportunities and challenges that digital media creates for the public intellectual who seeks to influence political culture and political consciousness. The success with which Mazhar's ideas circulated through digital media in the period leading up to the 2024 uprising, reaching student activists who would not have encountered his work through conventional print media, demonstrates that the digital transformation of the media environment, while it creates new risks and new forms of manipulation, also creates new possibilities for the circulation of radical thought that earlier generations of public intellectuals could not have imagined.

The relationship between the public intellectual and political power, in the specific context of post-uprising Bangladesh, is one of the most theoretically interesting and practically difficult questions that Mazhar's current position raises. The fact that his partner Farida Akhter has accepted a position as adviser to the Yunus interim government, while Mazhar himself has consistently criticized the direction that government has taken and has maintained his intellectual independence from it, creates a complex and in some respects unprecedented situation in the history of Bangladeshi intellectual life. It raises questions about the conditions under which proximity to state power can coexist with intellectual independence, about the different roles available to different intellectual figures in moments of political transition, and about the relationship between the critical intellectual project and the practical requirements of governance.

These questions do not admit of easy answers, and Mazhar has not offered easy answers to them. What he has consistently maintained, in the face of the pressures and temptations of the post-uprising political environment, is the commitment to the intellectual independence that has characterized his career from the beginning: the refusal to subordinate the demands of intellectual honesty to the demands of political alignment, even when that political alignment is

with a government that claims to be committed to the principles of democratic transformation that he has advocated throughout his career.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX: JURISPRUDENTIAL ANALYSIS OF MAZHAR'S CONSTITUTIONAL INTERVENTIONS IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The jurisprudential dimensions of Mazhar's constitutional interventions deserve systematic analysis from the perspective of comparative constitutional law, a perspective that Part Five of this textbook developed extensively in relation to the substantive content of his constitutional proposals. Part Six, with its focus on his public intellectual practice, requires a complementary analysis of the jurisprudential method through which he conducts his constitutional arguments, the specific legal doctrines and constitutional principles he invokes, and the relationship between his constitutional argumentation and the formal structures of Bangladeshi constitutional law.

Mazhar's approach to constitutional argument is not that of the technical legal practitioner, who works within the established doctrinal framework of a specific jurisdiction and seeks to achieve particular legal outcomes through the application of established legal rules and precedents. It is, rather, the approach of a constitutional theorist who operates at the intersection of philosophy, political theory, and constitutional law, who uses the formal categories of constitutional doctrine as entry points into broader philosophical and political arguments, and who consistently presses beyond the limits of existing doctrine to argue for fundamental constitutional transformations that existing doctrine cannot accommodate.

This approach has been described by the constitutional law scholar Mark Tushnet as the practice of constitutional outside-the-law argumentation: the use of constitutional rhetoric and constitutional concepts in political argumentation that is aimed not at persuading courts to apply existing constitutional law in a particular way but at building the political movement necessary to change the constitutional law itself. Tushnet's concept, developed in his analysis of the American constitutional tradition, provides a useful framework for understanding Mazhar's constitutional practice, with the important qualification that in the Bangladeshi context, where the constitutional tradition is much shorter and the political stakes of constitutional argument are in some respects more immediately urgent, the distinction between inside-the-law and outside-the-law constitutional argumentation is less clear and less stable.

The specific constitutional doctrines that Mazhar invokes in his constitutional arguments connect his work to some of the most important developments in comparative constitutional law over the past three decades. The basic structure doctrine, which the Indian Supreme Court developed in the 1973 *Kesavananda Bharati* decision and which the Bangladeshi Supreme Court has applied in its own constitutional jurisprudence, holds that certain fundamental features of a constitutional order cannot be amended even by a constitutional majority, because their amendment would destroy the essential identity of the constitution itself. Mazhar's argument that the systematic hollowing out of the democratic and fundamental rights provisions of the Bangladeshi constitution by the Hasina government represented a constitutional violation of the basic structure doctrine, even when each individual amendment was formally within the government's

constitutional authority, is a sophisticated deployment of this doctrine in a political context where its formal legal application was impossible.

The concept of constitutional moments, developed by the American constitutional scholar Bruce Ackerman, is another doctrinal resource that Mazhar has deployed in his constitutional argumentation. Ackerman argues that in the history of constitutional democracies, there are rare but enormously significant moments of popular constitutional politics in which the ordinary citizenry, acting through higher lawmaking processes that transcend the conventional mechanisms of legislative politics, transforms the fundamental constitutional commitments of the political order. The 2024 uprising, in Mazhar's analysis, represents precisely such a constitutional moment in Bangladesh: a moment in which the constituent power of the people has asserted itself against the constituted powers that had been using the formal mechanisms of constitutional law to destroy the substantive conditions of democratic governance.

The jurisprudential debate about the relationship between constituent power and constitutional continuity is directly relevant to the specific legal and political situation that the Bangladeshi post-uprising period presents. The question of whether the uprising of 2024 produced a revolutionary break in constitutional continuity, which would require the establishment of an entirely new constitutional order, or whether it represented a crisis within the existing constitutional framework that can be managed through the mechanisms of constitutional law as they currently exist, is one of the most consequential constitutional questions that Bangladesh faces. Mazhar's position, consistent with his theory of constituent power, is that the uprising represents a genuine revolutionary break, a manifestation of constituent power that calls for a new constitutional beginning rather than a continuation of the existing constitutional order.

The comparative jurisprudential literature on post-revolutionary constitutional continuity and discontinuity provides important context for evaluating this argument. The German experience of 1945, in which the Federal Republic's Basic Law represented a genuine constitutional break with the constitutional order of the Third Reich, the South African experience of the 1990s, in which the post-apartheid constitution represented a fundamental constitutional transformation while maintaining some elements of legal continuity, and the various post-Arab Spring constitutional experiences, in which the question of constitutional continuity versus revolutionary discontinuity was handled with varying degrees of success and failure, all illuminate the specific choices that Bangladesh faces in its post-uprising constitutional moment.

The jurisprudential analysis of Mazhar's position on the Digital Security Act and its successor, the Cyber Security Act, provides a particularly clear illustration of the relationship between his constitutional theory and the specific doctrines of constitutional law. His argument that these laws violate the constitutional guarantee of freedom of expression in Article 39 of the Bangladesh Constitution is not merely a straightforward application of existing constitutional doctrine; it is an argument that deploys constitutional doctrine in the service of a broader philosophical argument about the conditions of genuine democratic governance.

The proportionality doctrine, which has become one of the most important tools of constitutional adjudication in comparative constitutional law, is directly relevant to the constitutional challenge to the Digital Security Act. The proportionality doctrine holds that limitations on constitutional

rights must be proportionate to the legitimate governmental objectives they pursue: they must be rationally connected to those objectives, must impair constitutional rights as little as possible, and the benefits they achieve must be proportionate to the costs they impose on the rights that are limited. The systematic application of the proportionality doctrine to the Digital Security Act's provisions, which Mazhar has conducted in his constitutional writing, demonstrates with analytical precision why the Act fails the proportionality test: its provisions are wildly disproportionate to any legitimate governmental objective, because the actual purpose they serve is not the prevention of genuine harms but the suppression of political criticism.

The recent constitutional jurisprudence in the region on freedom of expression and digital regulation is directly relevant to Mazhar's analysis. The decisions of the Indian Supreme Court in *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India* (2015), which struck down provisions of the Indian Information Technology Act that were analogous to the Digital Security Act's provisions, and in various subsequent digital rights cases, provide comparative jurisprudential support for Mazhar's constitutional position. The analysis of the Supreme Court of Pakistan in various cases challenging analogous restrictions on digital expression, and the jurisprudence of the Sri Lankan courts on similar questions, all provide comparative context that strengthens the constitutional argument that Mazhar has been making about the unconstitutionality of Bangladesh's digital repression legislation.

The constitutional implications of the interim government's decision to release those imprisoned under the Digital Security Act, and the subsequent political debates about whether the Cyber Security Act should be repealed entirely or replaced with more narrowly drawn legislation, are constitutional questions on which Mazhar has continued to intervene in the post-uprising period. His argument that partial reform is insufficient, that the entire legal framework of digital repression must be replaced with a genuinely robust constitutional protection of freedom of expression as a prerequisite for genuine democratic governance, is consistent with his broader constitutional theory but has been contested by those who argue for a more incrementalist approach to constitutional reform.

The constitutional debate about the rights of the Chakma and other indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which Mazhar has engaged with extensively in his constitutional writing and activism, provides another important jurisprudential dimension of his constitutional interventions. The international human rights law framework applicable to the rights of indigenous peoples, particularly the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007, to which Bangladesh is a signatory, creates obligations that the Bangladeshi state has consistently failed to honor. Mazhar's argument that a genuinely new constitutional order must incorporate explicit constitutional protections for the rights of indigenous peoples, grounded in both the international human rights law framework and in the broader principle of cultural plurality that his constitutional theory develops, represents an important contribution to the constitutional debate about the rights of Bangladesh's most marginalized communities.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: THE PHILOSOPHY OF LALON, SPIRITUAL DEMOCRACY, AND THE CRITIQUE OF RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM

The centrality of Fakir Lalon Shah to Farhad Mazhar's intellectual project has been noted throughout this textbook, but the specific philosophical content of the Lalon tradition and its relationship to Mazhar's political and constitutional thought deserves more extended analysis than it has received in earlier chapters. This chapter undertakes that analysis, examining the philosophical dimensions of the Baul and Fakiri tradition as Mazhar understands and deploys them, the relationship between the spiritual philosophy of that tradition and the political philosophy of democratic self-determination that Mazhar has developed, and the specific way in which his defense of the Baul tradition in the context of the post-uprising threat of religious nationalism connects the deepest philosophical commitments of his intellectual project to the most urgent political challenges of the current moment.

Lalon Shah, who lived from approximately 1772 to 1890, is one of the most philosophically significant figures in the entire history of Bengali intellectual culture. His life and thought stand at the intersection of the Hindu Vaishnava tradition, the Islamic Sufi tradition, and the indigenous religious traditions of the Bengal delta, and he developed, through a body of more than two thousand songs, a philosophical system of extraordinary depth and originality that refuses the boundaries that orthodox religion draws between these traditions and that insists on the primacy of the individual spiritual seeker's direct experience of the divine over any externally imposed religious authority.

The philosophical core of Lalon's teaching is organized around several interrelated themes that Mazhar has identified as philosophically central and politically significant. The first is the concept of *maner manush*, the man within the man, the inner human being who is the seat of spiritual knowledge and the locus of the divine within the individual person. This concept, which has no direct parallel in either orthodox Islamic or orthodox Hindu theology, represents a distinctive philosophical anthropology in which the human being is understood not as a fallen creature dependent on external religious authority for their access to the divine, but as a being who contains within themselves the potential for direct spiritual knowledge and direct communion with the divine.

The political implications of this philosophical anthropology are significant and are ones that Mazhar has explicitly developed in his intellectual work. An understanding of the human being as the seat of spiritual knowledge and spiritual dignity, as a being whose inner life is the primary locus of the divine and who is therefore not dependent on external religious authority for their spiritual standing, is an understanding that has direct implications for the theory of political authority and political legitimacy. If every individual person is, in this sense, a spiritual being of intrinsic worth and dignity, then political arrangements that treat people as subjects of authority rather than as agents of their own self-determination are not merely politically unjust but spiritually false: they deny the spiritual truth of the person's inner dignity and self-governance.

This connection between Lalon's spiritual philosophy and a democratic political philosophy may seem, at first, to involve an illegitimate movement from the spiritual to the political. But Mazhar's argument is that this connection is not illegitimate because the spiritual and the political are not, in Lalon's philosophical framework, separate domains. Lalon's philosophy is not a form of otherworldly mysticism that withdraws from the concerns of social and political life into a private sphere of spiritual experience. It is, rather, a philosophy that finds the spiritual in

the social, that understands the practice of human solidarity and mutual recognition as themselves spiritual practices, and that sees the political arrangements through which people govern their common life as expressions of their spiritual commitments.

The second major philosophical theme in Lalon's work that Mazhar identifies as politically significant is the critique of religious orthodoxy and of the forms of authority that religious institutions claim over the spiritual life of the individual. Lalon's songs consistently challenge the authority of the mullah and the priest, the pandit and the qazi, over the spiritual life of the individual seeker. They insist that the formal markers of religious identity, circumcision, the sacred thread, temple attendance, mosque attendance, are external forms that bear no necessary relationship to the spiritual condition of the person who performs them, and that the spiritual seeker who prioritizes the inner search for the divine over conformity to external religious authority is following a truer religious path than the formally observant person who has never engaged in genuine spiritual inquiry.

This critique of religious orthodoxy is not, in Mazhar's analysis, an expression of secular rationalism or of religious skepticism. It is not the Enlightenment critique of religion as superstition or the Marxist critique of religion as ideology. It is, rather, a critique that comes from within the religious tradition, from the perspective of a spiritual philosophy that takes the divine more seriously than orthodoxy does, and that criticizes orthodoxy precisely for its failure to honor the depth of the spiritual reality it claims to represent. This is a distinction that Mazhar has insisted on consistently and that has significant implications for his relationship to the contemporary debates about secularism and religion in Bangladesh.

The philosophical framework that Mazhar derives from Lalon's thought provides, among other things, a basis for resisting both secular nationalism and religious nationalism without retreating to the position of religious indifference that secular nationalism requires. He can defend the Baul tradition against the attacks of religious nationalists not by arguing that religion is a private matter that should be kept out of politics, but by arguing that the religious nationalism that attacks the Baul tradition represents a philosophically inferior and spiritually impoverished form of religiosity compared to the rich, open, and spiritually serious tradition of the Baul and Fakiri songs. This is an argument that addresses religious nationalists on their own terrain, challenging them not with the discourse of secular rights but with the discourse of authentic spiritual life and genuine religious tradition.

The concept of spiritual democracy that can be derived from Lalon's philosophy, and that Mazhar has developed in his intellectual work, represents one of the most original contributions of his intellectual project to the theory of democratic politics. Spiritual democracy, as Mazhar understands it, is not a form of theocracy or of religious governance. It is, rather, a form of democratic politics that is grounded in the spiritual dignity of the individual person, that takes seriously the inner life of the citizen as a dimension of their political existence, and that insists on the conditions of genuine spiritual freedom, including freedom of religious practice, freedom of spiritual inquiry, and freedom from the coercive authority of religious institutions, as preconditions of genuine political democracy.

This concept connects to several important currents in contemporary political philosophy. The work of Charles Taylor on the politics of recognition, in which the recognition of the identity of individuals and communities, including their religious and spiritual identities, is argued to be a condition of genuine political equality, provides one theoretical parallel. The work of Amartya Sen on the capabilities approach, in which the capability for spiritual life and religious practice is included among the central human capabilities that just social arrangements must protect, provides another. And the more recent work of Cornel West on the prophetic tradition in American democracy, which argues for the political significance of spiritual commitment and religious experience in democratic political life, provides yet another.

Mazhar's development of the concept of spiritual democracy in the specific context of Bengali and Bangladeshi intellectual and political history is an original contribution that goes beyond these theoretical parallels. It draws on the specific resources of the Baul and Fakiri tradition, on the specific political conditions of a country in which religious identity has been deeply politicized and in which the relationship between religion and democracy has been one of the most contested dimensions of political life since independence, and on the specific philosophical synthesis that Mazhar has developed through his engagement with both indigenous Bengali philosophical traditions and the international theoretical resources of Marxism, postcolonial theory, and critical philosophy.

The defense of the Baul tradition against the attacks of religious nationalism in the post-2024 political environment is, from the perspective of this philosophical framework, not merely a defense of a cultural practice or of a minority religious community. It is a defense of the philosophical conditions of genuine democratic culture in Bangladesh: the defense of the tradition of spiritual freedom, of religious plurality, of the primacy of inner experience over external authority, and of the solidarity across religious boundaries that the Baul tradition has sustained for centuries and that genuine democratic political community in Bangladesh requires.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION TO PART SIX: THE LEGACY OF A LIFETIME IN THE ARENA

Part Six of this textbook has examined, in systematic detail, the dimensions of Farhad Mazhar's public intellectual practice: the institutional architecture he built through Chinta and UBINIG and Nayakrishi Andolon; the rhetorical strategies that characterize his interventions in the public sphere; his practice as a poet in relationship to his practice as a philosopher; the personal costs of his intellectual independence, including the 2017 disappearance and the sustained campaigns of political persecution; the extraordinary influence of his 2023 book on the 2024 uprising; his ongoing engagement with the incomplete revolution and its evolving threats; his connections with global intellectual networks; the jurisprudential dimensions of his constitutional interventions; and the philosophical foundations of his thought in the tradition of Lalon Shah.

The picture that emerges from this examination is of an intellectual life of extraordinary richness, consistency, and consequence. Over five decades of public intellectual practice, Mazhar has sustained a commitment to intellectual independence, theoretical seriousness, and political

urgency that is rare in any intellectual tradition and that has been maintained at significant personal cost in the specific conditions of Bangladeshi political life. He has built, through his writing, his organizing, and his personal example, a tradition of radical public intellectual engagement that has demonstrably shaped the political consciousness of a generation of Bangladeshi political activists, and whose most dramatic manifestation was the role that his theoretical framework played in the 2024 uprising.

The tensions and contradictions in his intellectual project are also real and deserve acknowledgment. His characterization of political actors as fascist, while theoretically grounded, has contributed to the polarization of Bangladeshi political discourse in ways that have not always been productive. His relationship with the political Islam of the Bengali countryside is complex and at times apparently contradictory: his defense of the Baul tradition against religious nationalism sits alongside a refusal of the secular nationalist dismissal of Islamic thought that has led some observers to read his positions as inconsistent. His analysis of the 2024 uprising as a manifestation of constituent power may overstate the theoretical sophistication and the constitutional consciousness of a movement that was, in its origins and in much of its social base, driven by more immediate grievances and more pragmatic demands than the theory of constituent power suggests.

These tensions and contradictions are not, however, merely weaknesses to be noted and then set aside. They are, in many respects, the most intellectually productive dimensions of his project: the places where the genuine difficulties of the questions he is addressing become visible, where the limits of available theoretical frameworks are encountered, and where the need for further intellectual work is most clearly indicated. The mark of a genuinely important intellectual is not the absence of contradiction but the capacity to work with contradiction productively, to allow the tensions in one's thought to generate further thinking rather than to be resolved prematurely through the adoption of a more consistent but less adequate framework.

The extraordinary sequence of events that began with the publication of *Gono-Ovyutthan o Gathan* in 2023 and continued through the 2024 uprising and its aftermath represents, whatever its ultimate political outcome, a remarkable vindication of the model of public intellectual practice that Mazhar has embodied throughout his career. The demonstration that sustained theoretical work, conducted over decades with intellectual integrity and political independence, can at the right historical moment exercise genuine political influence, that the ideas developed in the pages of a small-circulation Bengali magazine can shape the consciousness of a generation of student activists who overturn a fifteen-year authoritarian government, represents one of the most compelling cases for the political importance of intellectual work in the history of modern Bangladesh and one of the most important illustrations of what the public intellectual tradition, at its best, can achieve.

Part Seven of this textbook will examine Mazhar's agrarian theory in its full systematic development, analyzing the philosophical, economic, and ecological dimensions of his critique of industrial agriculture, his alternative theory of peasant knowledge systems and seed sovereignty, and his vision of a genuinely ecological and socially just agricultural order, placing his contribution in the context of both the international debates about food sovereignty and the specific conditions of Bangladeshi agrarian life.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC AND THEORETICAL NOTES FOR PART SIX

On the theory of the public intellectual, the foundational texts are Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*, available in the *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (1971), and Jean-Paul Sartre's *What is Literature?* (1948). Edward Said's *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), the Reith Lectures in which he develops his model of the exiled public intellectual, is the most important single modern contribution to the theory. Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals* (1987) provides a provocative critique of the academicization of intellectual life. The responses to Jacoby include Richard Posner's *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* (2001) and the more sympathetic analysis of Daniel Brandt on the conditions of genuine public intellectual work.

On the public sphere and its conditions, Jurgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962, trans. 1989) remains the foundational text. Nancy Fraser's critical response in her essay *Rethinking the Public Sphere*, published in *Social Text* in 1990, is essential reading. Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002) develops the theory of how publics are formed through the circulation of texts in ways directly relevant to understanding publications like *Chinta*. The digital transformation of the public sphere is addressed in Andrew Chadwick's *The Hybrid Media System* (2013) and in Zizi Papacharissi's *Affective Publics* (2015).

On parrhesia and frank speech, Michel Foucault's lectures at the College de France, published as *The Courage of Truth* (2011) and *The Government of the Self and Others* (2010), provide the essential theoretical analysis. The application of Foucault's analysis of parrhesia to contemporary democratic theory is developed in James Bernauer and Michael Mahon's essay in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* and in Jeremy Moss's work on Foucault and political reason.

On the philosophy of Lalon Shah and the Baul tradition, the foundational scholarly analysis in English is Jeanne Openshaw's *Seeking Bauls of Bengal* (2002). Carol Salomon's work on Lalon's songs, published in various scholarly journals, provides essential textual analysis. Sudhir Chakravorty's work in Bengali on the Baul tradition is fundamental for any serious engagement with the tradition's philosophical content. Mazhar's own writings on Lalon, available in Bengali through UBINIG and *Chinta* publications, represent the most philosophically developed engagement with the tradition's significance for political thought.

On the theory of constituent power and democratic transformation, the works cited in the bibliographic note to Part Five remain the essential reference points. The more specifically relevant contributions to the analysis of the 2024 Bangladeshi uprising include the reports of the International Crisis Group, the documentation of the Committee to Protect Journalists, and the emerging academic literature on the uprising including early analyses in the journals *Democratization* and the *Journal of Democracy*. Mazhar's own interview with *The Daily Star* published in September 2024, and his lecture at the Bangla Academy in December 2024, are primary sources of the first importance for understanding his analysis of the post-uprising situation.

On digital rights and constitutional law, the Indian Supreme Court's decision in *Shreya Singhal v. Union of India* (2015) is the most directly relevant comparative jurisprudential precedent. The analysis of David Kaye, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, in his reports to the Human Rights Council on digital repression, provides important international legal context. The reports of Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Committee to Protect Journalists on the Digital Security Act and the Cyber Security Act provide essential documentation of the human rights situation that Mazhar's constitutional analysis addresses.

On food sovereignty and seed rights, the foundational theoretical texts include Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive* (1988) and *Monocultures of the Mind* (1993), Paul Richards's *Indigenous Agricultural Revolution* (1985), and James Scott's *Seeing Like a State* (1998). The more recent literature includes Philip McMichael's *Development and Social Change* (2012), Eric Holt-Gimenez's *A Foodie's Guide to Capitalism* (2017), and the reports of the High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition at the Committee on World Food Security. UBINIG's own publications, available through its Dhaka office, document the practical achievements and the theoretical framework of the *Nayakrishi Andolon*.

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On Farhad Mazhar's specific intellectual biography, the primary sources include his own published works in Bengali, including the collected poetry volumes, the selected writings in *Chinta*, and the book *Gono-Ovyutthan o Gathan* (2023). The Wikipedia entry on Mazhar, updated as of November 2024, provides useful biographical information. The interviews published in *The Daily Star* (September 2024), *bdnews24.com* (various dates 2024-2025), and *The Business Standard* (November 2025) are primary sources for his post-uprising intellectual activity. The ETV Bharat interview conducted immediately after the fall of the Hasina government in August 2024 provides important first-hand documentation of his immediate political response to the uprising. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Kyoto Prize lecture of 2012 is an important primary source for the intellectual relationship between Mazhar and the international postcolonial theory network.

End of Part Six. Part Seven will examine Farhad Mazhar's agrarian theory in its full systematic development, analyzing his philosophical critique of industrial agriculture, his alternative theory of peasant knowledge systems and seed sovereignty, the theoretical foundations of Nayakrishi Andolon, and his vision of an ecologically and socially just agricultural order, placing his contribution in the context of the global debates about food sovereignty, biodiversity rights, and the political economy of agriculture in the twenty-first century.

PART SEVEN: THE AGRARIAN IMAGINATION

Philosophy, Ecology, Seed Sovereignty, and the Theory of Nayakrishi Andolon

PROLOGUE TO PART SEVEN: WHERE THE EARTH THINKS

There is a passage in one of Farhad Mazhar's Bengali essays, written sometime in the mid-1990s at the height of his engagement with the practical organization of what would become Nayakrishi Andolon, where he makes a claim that, on first reading, seems extravagant to the point of provocation. He writes, approximately translated, that the seed does not merely grow; it remembers. The seed carries within its biological structure the accumulated intelligence of ten thousand years of human agricultural practice, of the conversations between farmers and plants, of the negotiations between communities and their specific ecological niches, of the particular social arrangements through which one generation transmitted to the next the knowledge of what grew well in which soil under which conditions and in which combination with what other plants. The seed is, in Mazhar's phrase, a living archive of civilization.

This claim is not a metaphor. Or rather, it is a metaphor in the sense that all serious philosophical propositions about complex realities require analogical and figurative language to grasp what purely technical description cannot capture. But behind the figurative language lies a set of rigorous theoretical propositions about the nature of knowledge, about the relationship between biological and social processes, about the epistemological status of practical agricultural wisdom, and about the political implications of the attempt by the corporate seed industry to replace farmer-managed seed systems with commercially produced, genetically uniform, proprietary seed varieties. These propositions constitute, taken together, one of the most philosophically sophisticated contributions to agrarian theory in the contemporary intellectual landscape of South Asia, and indeed in the global literature on food sovereignty and agricultural alternatives.

Part Seven of this textbook is devoted to a systematic examination of Mazhar's agrarian theory in its full complexity and depth. It approaches this theory as simultaneously a philosophical position, a political-economic analysis, a jurisprudential argument, an ecological science, and a practical program for social transformation. It traces the intellectual genealogy of the theory through its engagement with multiple theoretical traditions, including Marxist political economy, postcolonial epistemology, the philosophy of indigenous knowledge systems, feminist political ecology, and the international food sovereignty movement. It analyzes the practical form that the theory has taken in the Nayakrishi Andolon movement, which represents not merely an experiment in alternative agriculture but a living demonstration of the philosophical principles that animate Mazhar's thought. And it situates his contribution in the context of the most recent theoretical and political developments in the global debates about food sovereignty, seed rights, biodiversity, and the constitutional status of agrarian communities, including the significant developments of 2024, 2025, and 2026 that have brought many of his core arguments into sharper focus and greater urgency than they possessed even a decade ago.

The stakes of this analysis are high. We are living in a moment when the question of who controls the world's seed supply has become, quite literally, a matter of life and death for hundreds of millions of farming families. The concentration of the global seed industry into the hands of a small number of transnational corporations, a process that has accelerated dramatically in the first decades of the twenty-first century through a wave of mergers and acquisitions, represents an enclosure of the biological commons of a scope and depth that has no historical precedent. At the same time, the climate crisis is demonstrating with terrible clarity the fragility of industrial agricultural systems based on genetic uniformity and chemical dependency, and the extraordinary value of the biodiversity that those systems have been systematically destroying. And the international legal and political frameworks that were constructed over the past three decades to govern seed rights, plant variety protection, and access to genetic resources are being challenged and renegotiated in ways that will determine the conditions of agricultural life for generations to come.

Farhad Mazhar was not the first person to think seriously about these questions. But his contribution to thinking about them is distinctive, original, and important in ways that the following chapters will attempt to make clear. He brings to the analysis of agrarian questions a combination of philosophical depth, political radicalism, ecological sensitivity, and practical organizational experience that is rare in any intellectual tradition. And he brings to the international debate about food sovereignty the specific perspectives and the specific resources of the Bengali deltaic farming tradition, which has accumulated over millennia a depth of ecological knowledge and practical agricultural wisdom that the industrial system has been systematically dismissing, undermining, and destroying since the Green Revolution of the 1960s.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF MAZHAR'S AGRARIAN CRITIQUE

1.1 Against the Separation of Thinking and Growing

The starting point for understanding Mazhar's agrarian theory is his fundamental philosophical opposition to the separation between theory and practice, between thinking and doing, between the intellectual life of the mind and the material life of the body in its engagement with the natural world. This opposition is not a new one in the history of philosophy. It runs, in various forms, through the whole of the Marxist tradition, from Marx's own critique of idealism and his insistence that the point is not merely to interpret the world but to change it, through the Gramscian analysis of the organic intellectual and the practical intellectual embedded in the life of a class or community, to the liberation philosophy of Paulo Freire and the insistence that genuine education must emerge from the concrete experience of the learner rather than being deposited, like coin in a bank, from outside.

But Mazhar's version of this opposition has a specific character that distinguishes it from these theoretical precedents, important as they are for his intellectual formation. It is grounded, first and foremost, in the specific experience of the Bengali delta, in the particular forms of practical knowledge and practical wisdom that the farming communities of the delta have developed

through their centuries of intimate engagement with the extraordinarily complex ecology of the riverine landscape. The delta farmer who knows which variety of rice survives the periodic flooding of the floodplains, which variety does well in the saline soils of the coastal margins, which variety is resistant to the blast fungus that strikes in warm wet seasons, and which combination of plants in a single field creates a microcosm of biodiversity that regulates its own pest populations without chemical intervention: this farmer possesses a form of knowledge that is not reducible to the kind of knowledge that agricultural science, as conducted in university laboratories and government research stations, produces.

This is not an anti-scientific position. Mazhar is not arguing that modern plant science has nothing to teach the farmer. He is arguing something more subtle and more important: that the separation between the farmer's practical knowledge and the scientist's theoretical knowledge, the institutional and epistemological separation between the field and the laboratory, between the traditional agricultural community and the university agricultural department, is itself a form of violence, a violence against the integrity of a form of knowing that has demonstrated its ecological effectiveness over millennia and that modern agricultural science, for all its technical sophistication, cannot replicate or replace.

The philosophical foundation of this argument draws on a rich tradition of thought about the nature of practical knowledge and its relationship to theoretical knowledge. The Aristotelian distinction between *episteme* (theoretical scientific knowledge), *techne* (practical knowledge of production and making), and *phronesis* (practical wisdom about how to live and act well) is one important reference point. Mazhar's argument, in its philosophical structure, is that modern agricultural science privileges *episteme* while dismissing both the *techne* of the farmer and, more fundamentally, the *phronesis* embedded in the farming community's accumulated understanding of what good agricultural life looks like, what it means to live well in and with a particular ecology, what the obligations of the present generation are to the land, the seeds, and the future generations who will inherit both.

The more directly relevant philosophical reference, however, is Michael Polanyi's analysis of tacit knowledge and the distinction between what we know explicitly and articulately and what we know in practice but cannot fully articulate. Polanyi's famous claim that "we can know more than we can tell" captures something essential about the character of the knowledge possessed by experienced farmers who have spent their lives in intimate engagement with particular soils, particular crops, particular ecosystems. This knowledge is not ignorance in the face of science. It is a different kind of knowing, one that is embodied, contextual, accumulated through practice and observation, and transmitted through social relationships and practical demonstration rather than through written texts and formal instruction.

Mazhar's contribution to this philosophical tradition is to add to it the specifically political dimension that Polanyi's analysis tends to underplay. The dismissal of farmer knowledge by agricultural science is not merely an epistemological error, not merely a failure to recognize the validity and value of an alternative form of knowing. It is also a political and economic act, one that serves the interests of those who profit from the replacement of farmer-managed seed systems and indigenous agricultural practices with commercially produced inputs, technologies, and services. The epistemological violence done to farmer knowledge is inseparable from the

economic violence done to farming communities by the transformation of agriculture from a practice of self-reproduction to a practice of dependency on commercial inputs. And both forms of violence are inseparable from the political violence done to rural communities by the state's systematic privileging of the knowledge claims of commercial agricultural science over the knowledge claims of farmers.

This three-dimensional analysis, epistemological, economic, and political, is what gives Mazhar's agrarian theory its distinctive power and its distinctive radicalism. It refuses the consolations of a purely epistemological critique that acknowledges the value of indigenous knowledge while leaving intact the political and economic structures that destroy it. And it refuses equally the limitations of a purely economic critique that focuses on the exploitation of farmers by agribusiness without attending to the deeper questions of knowledge, culture, and the relationship between communities and their ecological environments that are at stake in the agrarian crisis.

1.2 Marx, Nature, and the Metabolic Rift

The theoretical tradition within Marxism that provides the most important philosophical foundation for Mazhar's agrarian critique is the tradition, developed most fully in recent decades by scholars like John Bellamy Foster and Jason Moore, that takes seriously Marx's own engagement with the ecological dimensions of capitalism. Marx's concept of the metabolic rift, which he introduced in the third volume of *Capital* to describe the disruption of the natural exchange of matter between humanity and the earth caused by the separation of agriculture from its natural ecological grounding under industrial capitalism, has become, in the hands of contemporary critical agrarian scholars, one of the most productive theoretical tools available for analyzing the ecological crisis of modern food systems.

The metabolic rift concept begins from the observation, derived from the agricultural chemistry of Justus von Liebig, that industrial agriculture systematically depletes soil nutrients by removing crops from the land and sending them to urban centers, where the nutrients they contain are eventually discarded as waste rather than being returned to the soil. The result is the progressive impoverishment of agricultural land and the growing dependency of farmers on artificial chemical inputs, principally synthetic nitrogen fertilizers, to compensate for the nutrients that natural recycling processes would otherwise provide. This material disruption of the soil-plant-animal-human nutrient cycle is, in Marx's analysis, the ecological signature of capitalist agriculture, its fundamental unsustainability written into the chemistry of the soil.

Recent scholarship published in 2026 has deepened this analysis significantly, arguing that the metabolic rift concept highlights capitalism's disruption of socioecological metabolism by extracting soil nutrients from rural areas for urban consumption and discarding them as waste, and that the food sovereignty movement, as promoted by La Via Campesina, offers a concrete path to repair this metabolic rift through its six pillars fostering local production and resource circulation. [Taylor & Francis Online](#) This represents a significant convergence between the theoretical tradition that Mazhar has been developing for three decades and the cutting edge of contemporary critical agrarian scholarship.

Mazhar's engagement with the metabolic rift concept, though he does not always use this specific terminology, is evident throughout his agrarian writings. His critique of the Green Revolution and of subsequent waves of agricultural modernization in Bangladesh consistently focuses on the way these processes have disrupted the ecological cycles through which traditional farming systems maintained soil fertility, managed water, and sustained biodiversity without the dependency on external chemical inputs that has now become the condition of modern commercial farming. His analysis of how the shift from farmer-managed seed systems to commercially purchased hybrid and now increasingly genetically modified seeds breaks the cycle of seed saving, adaptation, and community-based crop improvement that has sustained agricultural biodiversity for millennia is a specific application of the metabolic rift logic to the sphere of biological reproduction.

But Mazhar's engagement with Marx's ecological thought goes beyond the metabolic rift concept. He is also deeply engaged with what some scholars have identified as the "deep ecology" dimension of Marx's thought: the scattered passages in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, in the Grundrisse, and in Capital where Marx describes nature as "the inorganic body of man" and argues that the liberation of humanity from the alienation of capitalist production requires the restoration of a genuinely reciprocal relationship between human beings and the natural world, a relationship in which humanity recognizes itself as part of nature rather than as the master of an external resource to be dominated and exploited.

This dimension of Marx's thought sits in some tension with the more productivist and technologically optimistic strands of Marxist theory, the strands that have dominated the orthodox Marxist tradition and that have made the mainstream left, in Bangladesh as elsewhere, generally hostile to or at best ambivalent about the kind of ecological and agrarian concerns that Mazhar has placed at the center of his intellectual project. The reconciliation of Marx's ecological insights with a politically coherent agrarian program is one of the central intellectual tasks that Mazhar has set himself, and the way he has approached this reconciliation tells us a great deal about the distinctive character of his theoretical contribution.

The reconciliation does not come through the selection of a single strand of Marxist thought at the expense of others. It comes through the synthesis of the ecological dimensions of Marx's thought with the insights of the indigenous philosophical traditions of the Bengal delta, and in particular with the specific forms of ecological wisdom that are embedded in the farming practices and the cultural-religious traditions of the peasant communities with whom Mazhar has worked through Nayakrishi Andolon. This synthesis, between the Western philosophical tradition represented by the best of the Marxist ecological inheritance and the indigenous philosophical traditions of the Bengali farming community, is the most distinctive and original aspect of Mazhar's agrarian theory.

1.3 Colonialism, Agricultural Science, and Epistemological Violence

The third major philosophical foundation of Mazhar's agrarian critique is his engagement with the postcolonial critique of science and of the relationship between colonial power and the production of knowledge about the natural world. This engagement draws on a rich tradition of postcolonial science studies, from Frantz Fanon's analysis of the cultural and psychological

dimensions of colonial domination, through the work of Aijaz Ahmad and Partha Chatterjee on nationalism and postcolonial thought, to the feminist critiques of science represented by Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive* and the more recent work of postcolonial science scholars like Warwick Anderson and Projit Mukharji.

The central claim of this tradition, as it applies to the analysis of agricultural knowledge systems, is that the colonial encounter did not merely involve the political subordination of colonized peoples; it also involved the systematic devaluation and destruction of their knowledge systems, and particularly of their practical knowledge of the natural world. Colonial agricultural science, which arrived in Bengal in the nineteenth century in the form of the Department of Agriculture established by the British Raj, did not come to learn from the farmers of Bengal about the agricultural ecology of the delta. It came to transform Bengali agriculture in the image of what colonial administrators and agricultural scientists believed good modern farming should look like: rational, scientific, efficient, and above all profitable in terms comprehensible to the colonial economy.

The consequences of this encounter for the agricultural knowledge systems of Bengal were profound and largely devastating. The specific varieties of rice, vegetables, pulses, and other crops that had been developed over centuries of careful farmer selection and adaptation to specific local ecologies were displaced by the varieties promoted by colonial agricultural science, which were selected for yield under conditions of chemical fertilization and controlled irrigation rather than for adaptability, resilience, and fitness to the specific conditions of particular ecological niches. The local systems for managing water, which had been developed over centuries of collective experience with the specific hydrology of the delta, were supplanted by centralized irrigation schemes designed according to engineering principles derived from European water management experience. And the social institutions through which agricultural knowledge was transmitted and collective decisions about planting, harvesting, and seed management were made were undermined by the individualization of agricultural production that the colonial commodity economy imposed.

Mazhar's agrarian theory is, among other things, a sustained attempt to recover and rehabilitate what colonialism and its neocolonial successors have tried to destroy. The *Nayakrishi Andolon*, which will be examined in detail in Chapter Five, can be understood in this light as a practical program of epistemological decolonization: an attempt to restore to the farming communities of Bangladesh the confidence in their own knowledge and the institutional conditions for the exercise of their own agricultural judgment that colonialism denied them. This is not a project of romantic primitivism, of pretending that nothing valuable has been learned in the past two centuries of agricultural science. It is a project of epistemological justice, of insisting that the knowledge systems of the farming communities of Bangladesh have a standing and a validity that the colonial and postcolonial developmental state has systematically denied, and that a genuinely just agricultural order must begin from the recognition of that standing.

The connection between this epistemological argument and the jurisprudential dimensions of Mazhar's agrarian theory is direct and important. The denial of farmer knowledge is also, in many cases, a legal denial: a failure of intellectual property law and biodiversity law to recognize the collective intellectual property embodied in the traditional crop varieties and farming

practices of rural communities, a failure compounded by the positive recognition that the same legal systems extend to the intellectual property claims of the corporations that appropriate and commercialize the biological resources that traditional communities created and maintained. The legal invisibility of traditional knowledge is not an accident of legal history; it is a structural feature of a legal system shaped by the needs and the worldview of a particular economic order, and challenging it requires both jurisprudential analysis and political mobilization.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CRISIS OF THE GREEN REVOLUTION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

2.1 The Arrival of the Green Revolution in Bangladesh

The Green Revolution, which transformed the agricultural systems of much of Asia and Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s through the large-scale introduction of high-yielding dwarf varieties of rice and wheat, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and irrigated monoculture farming, arrived in what was then East Pakistan and subsequently Bangladesh at a moment of acute political and economic crisis. The great famine of 1974, which killed hundreds of thousands of people in newly independent Bangladesh, created conditions in which the promise of dramatically increased yields from high-yielding variety seeds seemed not merely attractive but urgent, not merely a development option but a matter of national survival. The international development establishment, led by the World Bank, the International Rice Research Institute based in Los Banos in the Philippines, and the network of consultative group on international agricultural research centers, was prepared to provide the technical assistance, the seeds, and the loans that would enable the government of Bangladesh to embrace the Green Revolution.

The macroeconomic logic of this embrace was understandable and in certain narrowly defined respects persuasive. Bangladesh in the mid-1970s had one of the lowest per-capita food production levels in Asia. Its agriculture was dominated by small farmers working tiny plots with traditional varieties and traditional practices whose yields, measured in terms of tons of rice per hectare, were far below what the new high-yielding varieties could produce under optimal conditions. The development establishment's argument was simple and compelling in its simplicity: adopt the new seeds, the new fertilizers, the new irrigation systems, and yields will increase; increased yields will reduce food insecurity; reduced food insecurity will free resources for industrial development; industrial development will raise incomes; rising incomes will eventually enable the transition to a more diversified and sustainable agricultural system.

This argument had a certain internal logic, but it rested on a series of assumptions that were either false or deeply misleading. It assumed that the yield potential of the new varieties under optimal conditions was a reliable guide to their performance under the varied and often suboptimal conditions of Bangladeshi smallholder agriculture. It assumed that the increased yields from the new varieties would translate directly into increased food security for the rural poor, ignoring the distributional dynamics through which the benefits of the Green Revolution would accrue disproportionately to larger farmers with access to capital, irrigation, and commercial markets. It assumed that the dependence of the new varieties on chemical inputs was

an acceptable transitional cost rather than a structural feature of the system that would lock farmers into permanent dependency on commercial markets for inputs. And it systematically ignored the ecological costs of the transition to chemical-intensive monoculture: the soil degradation, the water contamination, the collapse of fish and aquatic biodiversity in rice fields that had previously served as a secondary source of protein for farming families, and above all the catastrophic erosion of the genetic diversity of rice varieties that had been maintained in the farmers' fields of Bangladesh over thousands of years.

Farhad Mazhar was among the first intellectuals in Bangladesh to subject the Green Revolution to a systematic philosophical and political critique, and his critique, developed through the pages of *Chinta* and through his organizational work with UBINIG from the 1980s onward, remains the most thoroughgoing and most intellectually sophisticated analysis of the Green Revolution's failure in the Bengali context that has been produced.

2.2 Yield, Nutrition, and the Fallacy of the Monoculture

Mazhar's critique of the Green Revolution begins with a fundamental challenge to the terms in which the success or failure of agricultural systems is evaluated. The Green Revolution was evaluated primarily in terms of yield: tons of rice per hectare, calories per unit of land, aggregate national food production measured in standard quantitative terms. By these measures, it achieved certain real gains, particularly in the early decades of its implementation. Rice yields in Bangladesh did increase significantly, and the country did move from a position of severe food insecurity to one of near food self-sufficiency, at least in terms of aggregate caloric availability.

But Mazhar argues that this measure of success systematically obscures what was actually happening to the nutritional and ecological situation of Bangladeshi farming communities. The Green Revolution in Bangladesh replaced the extraordinarily biodiverse mixed cropping systems of the delta, in which rice fields were integrated with fish cultivation, with the cultivation of a wide variety of vegetables, pulses, and other crops, and with the management of forest margins and water bodies for the collection of wild foods, with a relatively small number of high-yielding rice varieties, grown in monoculture with heavy chemical inputs, two or three times per year. The result was an increase in caloric production per unit of land, but simultaneously a dramatic reduction in the overall nutritional diversity available to farming families who had previously obtained a significant portion of their dietary protein, vitamins, and minerals from the diverse ecosystem that integrated agriculture maintained.

This argument about the relationship between agricultural biodiversity and nutritional security has been substantially confirmed by the nutrition science of the past two decades, though it was highly controversial when Mazhar first advanced it in the 1980s. Research on micronutrient malnutrition, which affects a much larger proportion of the global population than simple caloric deficiency, has repeatedly shown that the populations most vulnerable to micronutrient deficiencies are precisely those that have undergone the nutritional transition from diverse traditional diets to simplified diets dominated by a small number of staple crops. The "hidden hunger" of micronutrient deficiency, which stunts the physical and cognitive development of millions of children in Bangladesh and across the Global South, is in significant part the nutritional shadow of the Green Revolution's monoculture triumph.

Mazhar's argument connects this nutritional analysis to a broader philosophical critique of the kind of thinking that the Green Revolution embodies. The reduction of agricultural success to a single measurable quantity, yield in tons per hectare, reflects a mode of rational calculation that is profoundly reductive in its relationship to the complexity of actual agricultural systems and actual human nutritional needs. It exemplifies what James Scott, in his important 1998 book *Seeing Like a State*, calls "high modernist" thinking: the belief that the complexity of natural and social systems can be reduced to a small number of measurable variables that can be optimized through rational management. The Green Revolution was, in Scott's terms, a classic high modernist project: it simplified the extraordinarily complex agroecological systems of the Bengal delta into a small number of manageable parameters, optimized for those parameters, and in doing so destroyed much of what made those systems genuinely valuable, sustainable, and lifegiving.

2.3 The Political Economy of Agricultural Modernization

Beyond the nutritional and ecological critique, Mazhar develops a political-economic analysis of the Green Revolution that examines who actually benefited from it, who paid the costs, and how it transformed the class structure and the power relations of Bangladeshi rural society. This analysis draws on the tradition of critical agrarian studies associated with scholars like Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, Henry Bernstein, and the earlier work of Harriet Friedmann on food regimes, but it gives this international theoretical tradition a specific grounding in the conditions of Bangladeshi rural society that makes it both more concrete and more politically acute than the generic formulations of the international literature.

The political-economic argument begins with the observation that the Green Revolution in Bangladesh was not a neutral technological change available equally to all farmers. It was a package of inputs, seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and irrigation that required capital investment that only larger and more commercially connected farmers could easily afford. The small and marginal farmers who constitute the overwhelming majority of Bangladesh's agricultural population, most of them farming less than half a hectare of land with very limited access to credit and commercial markets, were structurally disadvantaged in their ability to capture the benefits of the new technology.

The differential adoption of Green Revolution technology thus tended to reinforce and in some cases exacerbate the existing inequalities of Bangladeshi rural society. Larger farmers who adopted the new varieties and the chemical input packages saw their yields and their cash incomes increase. Smaller farmers who could not fully adopt the package fell behind in terms of productivity and market competitiveness. Landless agricultural laborers, who had previously been partially sustained by the diverse ecosystem services of traditional delta farming, found those services increasingly unavailable as the transition to monoculture eliminated the fish, the wild plants, and the diverse secondary crops that had supplemented their incomes and their diets.

The parallel transformation of the seed system was particularly consequential. Traditional farming systems maintained genetic diversity in seeds through the annual practice of saving, selecting, and exchanging seeds within and between farming communities. This practice was not merely a way of ensuring the physical availability of planting material; it was the mechanism

through which farmers continuously adapted their crop varieties to changing conditions, selecting for disease resistance, for adaptability to specific microenvironmental conditions, and for the culinary and cultural qualities that were valued within particular communities. The Green Revolution displaced this practice by replacing farmer-managed seed systems with commercially produced hybrid seeds that could not be effectively saved and replanted, requiring farmers to purchase new seeds each season.

The commercial seed system thus created a structural dependency: once farmers adopted hybrid varieties and expanded their operations to the scale at which going back to traditional varieties and practices was no longer economically feasible, they were locked into a dependency on commercial seed markets that represented a permanent transfer of resources from farming communities to the commercial seed industry. This structural dependency is, in Mazhar's analysis, not an accidental byproduct of technological progress but a designed feature of the agrarian capital accumulation strategy that the Green Revolution served.

2.4 The Collapse of Agro-Biodiversity: Quantitative Evidence and its Implications

The ecological dimensions of the Green Revolution's impact on Bangladesh's agricultural biodiversity have been documented in considerable detail by researchers associated with UBINIG and Nayakrishi Andolon, and this documentation provides some of the most compelling empirical evidence for Mazhar's philosophical critique of agricultural modernization. The numbers are stark.

Before the Green Revolution, the farming communities of Bangladesh cultivated several thousand distinct varieties of rice, each adapted to specific ecological niches, seasonal conditions, soil types, and cultural preferences. These varieties represented the accumulated result of thousands of years of farmer-led plant breeding: careful, patient, ecologically informed selection by generations of farmers who were simultaneously cultivating their crops and observing, evaluating, and adapting them to the conditions of their specific agricultural environments. The diversity was not merely quantitative; it was qualitative, embodying an extraordinary range of ecological adaptations, nutritional profiles, culinary properties, and cultural meanings.

By the time Mazhar and his colleagues at UBINIG began systematic documentation of this situation in the 1980s, the number of rice varieties in active cultivation had fallen catastrophically. Estimates varied, but the broad picture was clear: the adoption of Green Revolution high-yielding varieties had displaced the vast majority of traditional varieties from farmers' fields, leaving them to survive only in the seed collections of a diminishing number of elderly farmers who had resisted the pressure to modernize, or not to survive at all. UBINIG's field research documented the disappearance of varieties, the loss of knowledge about their cultivation, and the erosion of the social institutions through which that knowledge had been transmitted.

This documentation was not merely an exercise in academic ecology. It was a political intervention. By making visible what was being lost, by giving names and stories and ecological profiles to the vanishing varieties, Mazhar and his colleagues were challenging the narrative of

agricultural progress that justified the continued destruction of biodiversity in the name of modernization. They were arguing that what the development establishment called progress was in fact a form of dispossession, a systematic destruction of the biological and cultural wealth of farming communities that had no legitimate developmental justification and that served the interests of commercial capital rather than the interests of farmers or consumers.

The UBINIG documentation project also served as the empirical foundation for the practical work of Nayakrishi Andolon in collecting, maintaining, and reintroducing traditional varieties. The recovery of lost varieties, some of them surviving only in the seed collections of individual elderly farmers, and their reintroduction into farming communities through community seed banks and farmer exchange networks, was and continues to be one of the most significant practical contributions of the movement that Mazhar helped to found.

CHAPTER THREE: EPISTEMOLOGY OF THE FIELD: PEASANT KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS AND THE POLITICS OF KNOWING

3.1 The Farmer as Scientist: Against the Hierarchy of Knowledge

One of the most philosophically significant and politically provocative dimensions of Mazhar's intellectual project is his systematic challenge to the epistemological hierarchy that places scientific knowledge above traditional or indigenous knowledge, laboratory knowledge above field knowledge, the knowledge produced by credentialed experts above the knowledge accumulated by communities through practical experience. This challenge is not unique to Mazhar; it has been advanced by many thinkers in the tradition of postcolonial thought, indigenous epistemology, and critical development studies. But Mazhar's version of the challenge is distinctive in several respects that deserve careful attention.

The distinctiveness begins with the empirical grounding of the argument. Mazhar does not simply assert, as a general philosophical proposition, that indigenous knowledge is valid and deserves respect. He demonstrates, through the specific empirical work of Nayakrishi Andolon's seed documentation and recovery programs, that the knowledge embedded in farmers' traditional crop varieties and farming practices is not merely locally adapted but scientifically sophisticated in ways that formal agricultural science is only beginning to understand. The mechanisms through which traditional farmer-led plant breeding achieves its results, mechanisms of cumulative selection under conditions that approximate natural selection in their emphasis on ecological fit and multiple-trait performance, are in many respects more effective than the mechanisms of formal plant breeding for the specific goal of developing varieties that perform well under the variable and stress-prone conditions of smallholder agriculture in the Global South.

This empirical grounding distinguishes Mazhar's epistemological argument from what might otherwise seem like mere cultural romanticism or anti-modernist nostalgia. He is not arguing that traditional knowledge is valuable because it is old, or because it represents an authentic cultural heritage, or because it deserves respect as the product of marginalized communities. He is

arguing that it is scientifically valid: that it produces results that formal agricultural science, working within its existing paradigms and institutional constraints, cannot match. This is a much stronger claim and a much more challenging one for the agricultural science establishment to dismiss.

The philosophical framework that supports this argument draws on a rich tradition of thinking about the epistemological virtues of diversity and the limits of formalization. The arguments developed by philosophers of science like Paul Feyerabend about the importance of theoretical pluralism and the dangers of epistemological imperialism, the arguments developed by feminist epistemologists like Donna Haraway about situated knowledge and the politics of objectivity, and the arguments developed by philosophers of ecology about the irreducible complexity of ecological systems and the limits of reductionist methodology all converge on a set of insights that Mazhar has applied specifically to the analysis of agricultural knowledge systems.

The core insight is this: agricultural systems are among the most complex systems that human beings manage. They involve interactions among soil chemistry, hydrology, microbiology, plant biology, insect ecology, climate variability, and the social systems through which farmers coordinate their activities, manage common resources, and transmit knowledge across generations. The formal scientific tools of agricultural research are extremely powerful for analyzing specific, isolated components of these systems under controlled experimental conditions, but they are much less powerful for understanding and managing the emergent properties of the system as a whole. The knowledge that farmers accumulate through long-term practical engagement with complete, uncontrolled, real-world agricultural systems is, for precisely this reason, not merely a supplement to formal scientific knowledge but in certain crucial respects a superior form of knowledge for the practical purposes of agricultural management.

3.2 The Epistemology of Seed Saving: Knowledge, Practice, and Community

The specific practice of seed saving, which is both the material foundation and the symbolic center of the Nayakrishi Andolon's approach to agricultural biodiversity, provides the richest illustration of what Mazhar means by peasant knowledge systems and why he regards them as philosophically significant rather than merely practically useful.

Seed saving, as practiced by experienced farmers in the tradition that Nayakrishi Andolon seeks to recover and maintain, is not a simple activity of putting aside some seeds from this year's harvest to plant next year. It is a sophisticated practice of continuous plant breeding, of observation and evaluation, of selection and adaptation, that demands a depth of plant knowledge, ecological sensitivity, and practical judgment that takes years to develop and that is transmitted primarily through practice and mentorship rather than through formal instruction.

The farmer who saves seeds must know the specific phenotypic characteristics that indicate high seed quality: the weight, the shape, the color, the moisture content, the structural integrity of the seed that indicate whether it will germinate reliably and produce vigorous plants. She must know the characteristics of the mother plant from which the seed should be selected: the plants that performed best under the specific conditions of this season, in this soil, with this weather, in this

location, are the plants whose seeds carry forward the adaptations that the community needs. She must know the storage conditions that will maintain seed viability over the months between harvest and planting. And she must know, in the broader sense, the relationship between the variety she is maintaining and the specific ecology of her farming system: which varieties work well together in polyculture systems, which varieties perform best under which soil and water conditions, which varieties provide the specific culinary, nutritional, and cultural qualities that her community values.

This knowledge is not written down, not codified in textbooks, not produced through controlled experiments. It is accumulated through years of careful observation and practice, transmitted through relationships between older and younger farmers, and continuously refined through the collective intelligence of farming communities that share observations, compare results, and learn from each other's experiences. It is, in the philosophical vocabulary of Michael Polanyi, paradigmatically tacit knowledge: knowledge that is expressed primarily in practice rather than in proposition, that cannot be fully formalized without losing essential dimensions of its content, and that resides not in individual minds but in the distributed intelligence of communities of practice.

Mazhar's philosophical analysis of this knowledge tradition draws a direct connection between its epistemological character and the social institutions that sustain it. The tacit, practical, community-embedded character of farmer knowledge is not merely an incidental feature of how it happens to be organized; it is constitutive of its nature and its value. The community seed bank, which is the institutional form through which Nayakrishi Andolon organizes the collective management of seed diversity, is not merely a storage facility for biological material. It is an institution for the collective maintenance and renewal of a distributed knowledge system, a site at which the tacit knowledge of many individual farmers is brought together, shared, challenged, and refined through collective deliberation and collective practice.

This institutional analysis has important implications for the critique of the intellectual property framework that governs seeds in the modern commercial system. The argument that individual inventors or corporations deserve intellectual property rights in the plant varieties they develop rests on a model of invention as an individual, discrete, identifiable act that can be attributed to a specific person or institution. But the development of plant varieties through farmer-led breeding is not like this at all. It is a collective, continuous, incremental process in which the contributions of any individual farmer are inseparable from the contributions of all the other farmers who have previously worked with and adapted the variety, and from the ecological processes through which the variety has been shaped by its interaction with specific environments. The intellectual property framework, which requires a discrete, individual, identifiable inventor, is simply inapplicable to this process and this kind of knowledge.

3.3 Gender and Agricultural Knowledge: Women as Primary Knowledge Holders

One of the most politically important dimensions of Mazhar's analysis of peasant knowledge systems is his insistence on the centrality of women in the transmission and maintenance of agricultural knowledge in general and seed knowledge in particular. This insistence is not merely a gesture toward gender equity; it reflects a substantive empirical observation that has been

confirmed by extensive field research conducted through UBINIG and Nayakrishi Andolon over more than three decades.

In the farming communities of Bangladesh, as in farming communities across much of the Global South, women are the primary custodians of seed diversity. It is women who are primarily responsible for seed selection, seed drying, seed storage, and the social networks through which seeds are exchanged between households and communities. Women's knowledge of the qualitative properties of different varieties, their nutritional profiles, their culinary characteristics, their specific ecological requirements, and their cultural and ceremonial significance, is typically deeper and more detailed than men's knowledge of the same varieties. The social and cultural practices through which seed diversity is maintained, including the ritual exchange of seeds at festivals and ceremonies, the informal networks of seed sharing among neighboring women, and the folk taxonomies through which different varieties are named, classified, and remembered, are primarily women's practices.

This gendered distribution of agricultural knowledge has profound implications for both the analysis of the Green Revolution's impact and the design of alternatives. The Green Revolution, and the subsequent waves of agricultural modernization that it initiated, have systematically undermined the social institutions through which women's agricultural knowledge was transmitted and exercised. The commercialization of seed production has replaced women's seed saving with commercial purchases, transferring control over seed from women within communities to companies and government agencies. The shift from diverse polyculture systems to monoculture has reduced the scope for the exercise of the detailed varietal knowledge that women maintained. And the integration of agricultural production into commercial markets has shifted the locus of agricultural decision-making from the household and community level, where women's knowledge was influential, to the market and government agency level, where it is invisible and irrelevant.

Nayakrishi Andolon's response to this analysis has been to place women's knowledge and women's agency at the center of its alternative program. The movement's community seed banks are managed primarily by women. Its seed exchange networks are primarily women's networks. Its farmer experimentation programs draw primarily on women's knowledge of varietal characteristics and ecological relationships. And its political advocacy for the rights of farming communities over their seeds is explicitly framed in terms of women's rights as primary knowledge holders and primary seed custodians.

This gender analysis adds an important feminist dimension to Mazhar's agrarian theory that connects it to the broader tradition of feminist political ecology and feminist critiques of development. The analysis of who controls biological resources, and how the loss of that control affects the most vulnerable members of agricultural communities, is enriched enormously by the gendered lens that Mazhar and his colleagues have brought to it, and this enrichment distinguishes the Nayakrishi Andolon approach from many other alternative agriculture movements that have paid insufficient attention to the gendered dimensions of agricultural knowledge and power.

3.4 The Bayesian Farmer: A Contemporary Theoretical Perspective

Recent developments in behavioral economics, cognitive science, and the philosophy of science have produced a body of theoretical work that provides, somewhat unexpectedly, powerful support for Mazhar's epistemological arguments about the sophistication of farmer knowledge. The emerging field of "adaptive management" in ecology and natural resource management, which recognizes that the management of complex adaptive systems requires continuous observation, experimentation, and revision rather than the application of fixed rules derived from controlled experiments, has been used by several contemporary theorists to analyze traditional ecological knowledge systems and to argue for their scientific validity.

The argument, in its most sophisticated form, is that experienced farmers operating in complex agroecological systems are effectively conducting sophisticated Bayesian inference: continuously updating their probabilistic assessments of the likely outcomes of different agricultural decisions on the basis of new observations, in ways that, while not formalized in mathematical terms, embody the same rational logic of belief revision under uncertainty that Bayesian epistemology describes. The farmer who plants a particular variety in a particular field because she has observed, over many seasons, that it performs well under the specific moisture conditions that typically prevail there, and who adjusts her assessment of the variety's performance as she accumulates new observations, is reasoning about agricultural risk and uncertainty in a way that is, in its logical structure, no less rigorous than the reasoning of a statistician analyzing experimental data.

This theoretical perspective from contemporary philosophy of science and cognitive science provides additional intellectual resources for Mazhar's argument that the dismissal of farmer knowledge by formal agricultural science represents not only a cultural and political injustice but an epistemological mistake, a failure to recognize the sophisticated rational structure embedded in practices that do not present themselves in the formal dress of scientific method. The convergence between this contemporary theoretical work and the agrarian philosophy that Mazhar has been developing for three decades is striking and suggests that his work has anticipated intellectual developments that are now gaining recognition in fields far removed from the specific context of Bangladeshi agrarian politics.

CHAPTER FOUR: SEED AS PHILOSOPHY: THE POLITICS AND METAPHYSICS OF BIODIVERSITY

4.1 The Ontological Status of the Seed

Among the most original and philosophically provocative aspects of Mazhar's agrarian theory is his treatment of the seed as a philosophical object, not merely a biological entity or an economic commodity but a thing whose ontological and ethical status raises fundamental questions about the nature of life, the relationship between past and future, and the obligations of the living to those who have not yet been born. The philosophical status of the seed, in Mazhar's analysis, is not merely a matter of interesting theoretical reflection; it has direct and urgent political and

legal implications for the framework within which questions of seed ownership, seed rights, and biodiversity governance should be approached.

The starting point of Mazhar's philosophical account of the seed is its temporal complexity. The seed is not simply a present thing. It is the bearer of a biological history that stretches back thousands of years, a living container of the accumulated consequences of countless acts of selection, adaptation, and cultivation by the farming communities that preceded us. But the seed is also a future thing: it is the material vehicle through which the biological potential of past cultivation is transmitted to future generations, the condition of possibility for the agricultural lives of people not yet born. The seed exists, in other words, simultaneously in the past, in the present, and in the future, and any adequate account of its status must acknowledge this temporal complexity.

This temporal dimension of the seed's existence has immediate implications for the question of ownership. Can the seed be owned? Mazhar's answer is nuanced and philosophically careful. He does not deny the possibility of rights over seeds in any form; what he denies is the possibility of exclusive private ownership of the kind that intellectual property law confers. The seed is not the creation of any individual inventor or any single act of creative labor. It is the product of thousands of years of collective human effort, embedded in a biological process of evolution and adaptation that no single person or institution can claim credit for. To grant exclusive ownership of a plant variety to a corporation on the basis of a single final step in a process of development that began millennia ago, and that depended at every stage on the accumulated knowledge and biological material of farming communities who were not consulted and who receive no compensation, is an act of appropriation that has no moral justification and that can be maintained only by the political and economic power of those who benefit from it.

This philosophical argument about the impossibility of legitimate exclusive ownership of plant varieties is the theoretical foundation of Mazhar's political opposition to the intellectual property framework that governs seeds in the modern commercial system, including the Convention on Biological Diversity's Nagoya Protocol, the TRIPS Agreement's provisions on plant variety protection, and the various national legislative instruments through which these international frameworks have been implemented. But it goes deeper than a merely negative critique of existing legal arrangements. It points toward a positive alternative framework for understanding the rights and obligations that should govern the relationship between farming communities and the biological resources they have created and maintained.

4.2 Seeds, Commons, and the Theory of the Biological Commons

The concept of the commons, which has a rich theoretical history stretching from the analysis of pre-enclosure English village common lands through E.P. Thompson's historical work on the moral economy of the English crowd to Elinor Ostrom's Nobel Prize-winning analysis of the governance of common pool resources, provides Mazhar with one of the most important theoretical tools for developing this positive alternative framework. Seeds, in Mazhar's analysis, are paradigmatically common resources: their value depends on maintaining genetic diversity that no individual farmer can maintain alone, their development and adaptation over time requires the collective intelligence and collective observation of communities of practice, and the

exclusion of any member of a farming community from access to the genetic diversity maintained by the community as a whole impairs the functioning of the entire system.

This analysis of seeds as commons has significant implications for institutional design. Ostrom's work on common pool resource governance demonstrated, against the predictions of Hardin's famous "tragedy of the commons" argument, that communities of resource users are often capable of developing highly effective institutions for managing common resources sustainably, without either the imposition of private property rights or the exercise of state control. The conditions for successful common governance that Ostrom identified, clearly defined boundaries, rules proportionate to local conditions, collective choice arrangements, effective monitoring, graduated sanctions, conflict resolution mechanisms, and recognition by external authorities, provide a framework for analyzing both the traditional institutions through which farming communities have historically managed seed diversity and the alternative institutions that movements like Nayakrishi Andolon are attempting to build.

Contemporary scholarship has emphasized that the re-localization of agri-food systems within specific territories significantly enhances possibilities for using greater diversity of cultivated and wild seed plants adapted to many heterogeneous environments, and that local control over seed saving and seed sharing is typically strongest in economies that combine market activities with non-monetary forms of exchange based on barter, reciprocity, gift relations, care, and solidarity. [Springer](#) This analysis directly supports Mazhar's argument that the recovery of seed sovereignty requires not merely a change in legal frameworks but a transformation of the economic and social relationships within which seed management is embedded.

The concept of the seed commons is also connected, in Mazhar's analysis, to the broader philosophical tradition of thinking about the relationship between the individual and the community in the management of shared resources. This connection points toward the Lalou philosophical tradition that was analyzed in Part Six: the Baul concept of *maner manush*, the person within the person, the inner being whose authenticity and whose liberation are constitutively tied to relationship with others and with the natural world, provides a philosophical foundation for the claim that the relationship between a farmer and her seeds is not merely an economic relationship but a relationship of mutual constitution, in which the farmer is who she is partly through her relationship with the varieties she cultivates and the knowledge she holds, and in which the seed is what it is partly through its relationship with the specific farming community and the specific ecological context that has shaped its development.

4.3 Intellectual Property, Biopiracy, and the Legal Framework

The legal dimensions of the seed sovereignty struggle are among the most technically complex and most politically contentious aspects of the broader agrarian politics that Mazhar has engaged with throughout his intellectual career. The international intellectual property framework as it applies to plant varieties was constructed primarily through two major multilateral instruments: the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants, known as UPOV, which provides a system of plant breeders' rights for commercially developed new varieties, and the TRIPS Agreement, which emerged from the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations and requires all member states of the World Trade Organization to provide intellectual property protection for

microorganisms and for essentially biological processes of producing plants and animals, as well as the possibility of such protection for plant varieties either through patents or through an effective sui generis system.

The impact of this international intellectual property framework on the seed systems of developing countries has been extensively documented and widely criticized by scholars, NGOs, and farmers' organizations. The most fundamental criticism is the one that Mazhar has advanced from the beginning: the framework systematically recognizes and rewards the final commercial step in the process of plant variety development while ignoring and indeed appropriating without compensation the far longer and more fundamental prior steps that were accomplished by the farming communities whose traditional varieties provided the genetic material and the accumulated adaptations on which commercial plant breeding drew.

The practice of biopiracy, the appropriation of traditional biological knowledge and genetic resources by commercial entities without the consent of and without compensation to the communities from which those resources originate, has been extensively documented and has generated enormous political controversy. Global South nations are now challenging "open access" control of digital genetic data that underpins future food security, with India, Brazil, and African countries seeking binding benefit-sharing arrangements, exploring blockchain tracking, and considering shifting seeds and data from existing treaties to regain sovereignty. [Down To Earth](#) This represents a significant escalation of the political and legal struggle over biological commons that Mazhar has been contributing to theoretically for decades.

The concept of "biocultural metadata" has emerged, recognizing that digital sequence information derived from genetic resources is not merely a string of genetic code but an encoded extension of the traditional knowledge held by farmers who developed these landraces, and Global South countries are classifying such data as protected intellectual property under national laws as a way of bypassing international deadlock. [Down To Earth](#) This development directly validates the philosophical argument that Mazhar has been making since the 1980s: that the biological material and the knowledge embedded in traditional crop varieties are inseparable dimensions of a single cultural-biological complex that has been created by specific communities and to which those communities have rights.

The introduction of the Seeds Bill 2025 in India, frequently called the 2026 Seed Act, has been analyzed as completing a pincer movement that began with the structural adjustment conditions accepted during the 1991 balance-of-payments crisis, representing the systematic dismantling of India's sovereign food systems through successive policy realignments to make way for global corporate players, steadily shifting the nation from food security to a dependency on cash-crop exports and expensive external inputs. [Global Research](#) This South Asian context is directly relevant to Bangladesh, which has faced similar structural pressures and similar legislative initiatives that Mazhar and UBINIG have consistently opposed.

4.4 The UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Its Philosophical Significance

A significant development in the international legal framework governing the rights of farming communities came in December 2018, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the

Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas, after more than a decade of negotiations in which La Via Campesina and its allied organizations played a central role. This declaration, though not legally binding in the way that international treaties are, represents a significant shift in the framework of international human rights law as it applies to the specific situation of rural communities and farming peoples.

The declaration explicitly recognizes, among other rights, the right of peasants to seeds, including the right to save, use, exchange, and sell farm-saved seeds and other planting material; the right to maintain, control, protect, and develop their seeds and traditional knowledge; and the right to the protection of their traditional knowledge related to plant genetic resources. It also recognizes the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to food sovereignty, and the right to a healthy environment. These provisions are directly responsive to the concerns that Mazhar and his colleagues at UBINIG had been articulating and documenting for decades before the declaration's adoption.

The philosophical significance of the UNDROP extends beyond its specific legal provisions. It represents a formal recognition, by the international community as represented in the General Assembly, that the human rights framework, which had developed primarily through the protection of individual civil and political rights and the recognition of economic and social rights, required expansion to address the specific situation of the world's peasants, fishers, pastoralists, and other rural peoples. The recognition that these communities have collective rights, including collective rights over biological resources and traditional knowledge, marks a significant departure from the individualist ontology that has dominated international human rights law since its foundation.

This philosophical shift in international law is directly connected to the theoretical arguments that Mazhar has been making throughout his intellectual career. His insistence that the rights of farming communities cannot be adequately protected by a legal framework that recognizes only individual rights, his argument that the collective dimensions of agricultural life and agricultural knowledge require collective legal recognition, and his contention that the traditional structures through which farming communities have governed their agricultural commons represent legitimate and valuable institutions deserving legal protection rather than displacement by state or market mechanisms: all of these arguments find significant, if imperfect, reflection in the UNDROP framework.

CHAPTER FIVE: NAYAKRISHI ANDOLON: THEORY, PRACTICE, AND POLITICAL ECONOMY

5.1 The Founding Vision: Theory Made Practical

Nayakrishi Andolon, which translates roughly as the New Agricultural Movement, was founded in the late 1980s and early 1990s as the practical organizational expression of the theoretical framework that Mazhar and his colleagues at UBINIG had been developing for the previous decade. Its founding is inseparable from the intellectual biography of Mazhar himself: it

represents the moment at which the theoretical critique of industrial agriculture was translated into a practical program of alternative agricultural development, and at which the philosophical arguments about peasant knowledge systems, seed sovereignty, and the ecological foundations of agricultural sustainability were given concrete institutional form.

The founding vision of Nayakrishi Andolon was simultaneously philosophical, political, and practical. Philosophically, it was grounded in the conviction that the knowledge, the biological resources, and the agricultural traditions of the farming communities of Bangladesh constituted a wealth of the first importance that the developmental state and the Green Revolution had been systematically destroying, and that the recovery and renewal of this wealth was both a matter of ecological and cultural justice and a practical precondition for a genuinely sustainable and equitable agricultural future. Politically, it was grounded in the conviction that the interests of farming communities, and particularly of the small and marginal farmers and the landless agricultural workers who constitute the most vulnerable members of rural Bangladeshi society, were systematically underrepresented or misrepresented by the developmental institutions and the political parties that claimed to speak in their name. And practically, it was grounded in the experience that UBINIG had accumulated through years of field research documenting the erosion of agro-biodiversity and the increasing vulnerability of farming communities to the combined effects of chemical input dependency, seed market manipulation, and ecological degradation.

The movement began in a small number of villages in the districts of Tangail and Pabna in central Bangladesh, working with farmer groups that were willing to experiment with the alternative approach that UBINIG was proposing. The initial focus was on seed recovery: the identification of elderly farmers who still maintained traditional rice varieties, the documentation of those varieties' characteristics and histories, the careful multiplication of seed stocks, and the gradual reintroduction of traditional varieties into the fields of participating farmers. This seed recovery work was not merely agricultural; it was, in Mazhar's philosophical framework, an act of cultural and epistemological recovery, a reclaiming by farming communities of biological wealth and practical knowledge that the Green Revolution had taken from them.

The early results of this work were simultaneously scientifically interesting and practically compelling. The traditional varieties that were reintroduced performed differently from the high-yielding varieties that had displaced them: they generally produced lower yields of grain per hectare under optimal chemical input conditions, but they performed comparatively better under the variable, stress-prone conditions of smallholder agriculture; they required fewer or no chemical inputs to maintain soil fertility and pest resistance; they provided a wider range of nutritional benefits; and they supported the survival of the fish, the aquatic plants, and the other non-crop species that had previously provided important supplementary food sources for farming families.

5.2 The Community Seed Bank: An Institutional Innovation

The community seed bank, which is the central institutional innovation of Nayakrishi Andolon's approach to biodiversity conservation, deserves sustained attention both as a practical institution and as a philosophical and political statement. The community seed bank is, in its simplest

description, a facility for the collective storage and management of diverse seed collections by a community of farmers. But in Mazhar's theoretical framework, it is much more than this: it is the institutional embodiment of a fundamentally different approach to the relationship between communities, biological resources, and the governance of agricultural commons.

The conventional approach to the conservation of agricultural biodiversity, as reflected in the international seed bank network that includes the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research gene banks, the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, and the national gene bank systems of individual countries, treats biodiversity conservation as a technical problem of storing biological material under controlled conditions for potential future use. The ex-situ conservation model, which removes seeds from their agricultural and community context and stores them in controlled environments, treats the seed as a purely biological object whose value is genetic, consisting in the information encoded in its DNA, and whose conservation requires only the maintenance of the physical integrity of that information, not the maintenance of the social, cultural, and ecological context in which that information was created and in which alone it can be properly understood and used.

Mazhar's analysis of the community seed bank begins with a fundamental challenge to this ex-situ model. The genetic information encoded in a seed variety cannot be properly understood or appropriately used without the tacit knowledge of the farming community that developed and maintained that variety. Removing the seed from its community context does not merely preserve it in an impoverished form; it destroys a significant dimension of its value. The genetic material remains, but the knowledge of how to grow it, when to plant it, how to manage it in combination with other crops, what ecological conditions it requires, what its specific culinary and cultural properties are, and how it relates to the other varieties in the community's portfolio of biological diversity, is lost with the community that held it.

The community seed bank, by contrast, maintains seeds in situ, within the agricultural community and the ecological context that give them their full meaning and value. It is a site of continuous, living cultivation: the seeds in the community seed bank are not frozen specimens but living populations, continuously growing, reproducing, and adapting under the conditions of actual agricultural practice. And the knowledge associated with those seeds is continuously renewed and expanded by the farmers who grow them, save them, observe their performance, and exchange their observations with other members of the community.

The governance structure of the community seed bank is also philosophically significant. In Nayakrishi Andolon communities, the seed bank is collectively owned and managed by the participating farmers, with women typically playing the central role in both the physical management of the seeds and the governance of the institution. Access to seeds from the bank is governed by community-established rules that reflect the specific values and needs of the participating community, rules that typically include provisions for free exchange of seeds among community members, for the sharing of newly recovered varieties with communities that have lost them, and for the restriction of access to outsiders who might commercialize the community's genetic resources without consent and without compensation.

This governance structure is a practical implementation of the philosophical principles about seed commons and collective rights that Mazhar has developed in his theoretical work. The community seed bank is not merely a place where seeds are kept; it is an institution through which a community exercises its collective rights over its biological heritage and through which the social relationships of mutual aid and reciprocal obligation that sustain agricultural communities in the face of a hostile commercial environment are reproduced and reinforced.

5.3 Ecological Agriculture as an Alternative System

Beyond the specific innovation of the community seed bank, Nayakrishi Andolon represents a comprehensive alternative approach to agricultural production that challenges the fundamental premises of industrial farming across a wide range of practices. The ecological agriculture that the movement promotes is not merely the reduction or elimination of chemical inputs, though that is one of its most visible practical expressions. It is a systematic reorganization of the relationships between crops, between the cultivated and wild components of the agricultural landscape, between the human community and the non-human ecology within which it is embedded, and between the present generation of farmers and the future generations whose agricultural possibilities depend on the ecological condition of the land.

The polyculture systems that Nayakrishi Andolon promotes, in which multiple crop varieties are grown together in complex spatial and temporal arrangements, represent a practical application of the ecological principle that diversity at multiple scales enhances the stability, resilience, and productivity of ecological systems. The diverse cropping systems of traditional Bangladeshi agriculture, in which rice fields integrated fish cultivation, the cultivation of wild aquatic plants, and the rotation of rice with diverse vegetable and pulse crops, maintained soil fertility through biological nitrogen fixation and organic matter cycling rather than through chemical fertilizers, managed pest populations through the natural controls provided by a diverse predator community, and provided farming families with a diverse diet from a relatively small area of land.

The recovery and extension of these polyculture systems is at once an ecological, a nutritional, an economic, and a philosophical project. Ecologically, it restores the biological diversity and the ecological processes that industrial monoculture has destroyed. Nutritionally, it provides the dietary diversity that reduces micronutrient deficiency among farming families. Economically, it reduces the dependency on commercial inputs and the vulnerability to market fluctuations that have made so many Bangladeshi farmers chronically indebted. And philosophically, it restores to farming communities the capacity to manage their agricultural systems as complex ecological relationships rather than as assemblages of standardized technological inputs managed according to external prescriptions.

5.4 The Scale of Achievement: Nayakrishi Andolon After Three Decades

By the time of writing, Nayakrishi Andolon has been operating for more than three decades and has achieved a scale and demonstrated a depth of results that have attracted increasing international attention. The movement currently encompasses several hundred thousand farming families across multiple districts of Bangladesh, organized in community groups that collectively

manage seed banks, conduct farmer experimentation programs, maintain ecological agriculture practices, and engage in political advocacy for the rights of farming communities.

The seed diversity maintained by Nayakrishi Andolon's community seed bank network is remarkable by any standard. The network maintains collections of several hundred distinct rice varieties, a comparable diversity of vegetable varieties, and significant collections of pulse, oilseed, and spice varieties, all maintained in active cultivation and continuously adapted to the specific conditions of participating communities. The recovery of varieties that had been lost from active cultivation represents one of the most significant achievements of the movement: UBINIG's documentation work has recovered and reintroduced numerous rice varieties that existed, at the time of discovery, only in the seed collections of individual elderly farmers, and that might otherwise have been lost permanently within a generation.

The ecological results of the movement's agricultural practices have been documented through systematic monitoring by UBINIG researchers and through independent academic research. Studies conducted in Nayakrishi communities consistently show higher levels of soil organic matter and soil biological activity, lower levels of pest damage, higher levels of dietary diversity and nutritional security among participating farm households, and lower levels of agricultural debt compared with control communities practicing conventional Green Revolution agriculture. These results provide the empirical foundation for Mazhar's theoretical argument that ecological agriculture, grounded in biological diversity and traditional knowledge, is not only environmentally superior to industrial monoculture but also economically rational and nutritionally superior for the farming families who practice it.

The political achievements of the movement have been more contested and more difficult to sustain in the face of the structural pressures exerted by the commercial seed industry, the government agricultural system, and the international development establishment. The movement has successfully resisted several attempts to introduce genetically modified crops into Bangladesh's rice sector, mobilizing the documented evidence of Bangladesh's extraordinary rice biodiversity and the specific ecological and cultural value of that diversity as arguments against the approval of GM varieties. It has contributed to the development of alternative legal frameworks for the protection of farmers' rights over seeds at the national level, and it has been an active participant in the international policy debates about plant genetic resources that have produced frameworks like the Nagoya Protocol and the UNDROP.

5.5 The Theoretical Significance of the Movement's Practice

The relationship between the theoretical work of Mazhar and the practical work of Nayakrishi Andolon is not a simple relationship of theory guiding practice or practice confirming theory. It is a more complex, dialectical relationship in which the practical experience of the movement continuously challenges, refines, and extends the theoretical framework from which it emerged. This dialectical relationship is itself a philosophical statement: it embodies the conviction, central to the Marxist tradition but given specific content by Mazhar's engagement with indigenous philosophical traditions, that genuine theoretical knowledge is not the product of pure reflection but of the engagement of reflection with the material conditions and the practical experience of real social movements.

The tensions and contradictions that the movement has encountered in its practical work have been productive rather than merely frustrating. The discovery that the recovery of traditional varieties is more complex and more demanding than initially anticipated, that the community institutions needed to sustain ecological agriculture require continuous political and organizational attention to maintain against the centrifugal pressures of the commercial system, and that the relationship between the movement and the state is more complicated than a simple opposition of alternative agriculture against the developmental state, have all contributed to a progressive sophistication of the theoretical framework.

The movement's experience has also generated new theoretical questions that were not fully anticipated in the original framework. The question of how ecological agriculture can be economically viable at scale, how farmers practicing ecological methods can access markets that adequately compensate the ecological and social values that their farming creates without being compelled to accept the price signals of a market that treats food as a commodity like any other, is a question that the movement has grappled with in practical terms and that Mazhar has addressed in his theoretical work in ways that draw on but go beyond the standard analyses of alternative agricultural economics.

CHAPTER SIX: FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AS CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT: JURISPRUDENTIAL DIMENSIONS

6.1 From Policy Goal to Fundamental Right: The Juridification of Food Sovereignty

One of the most significant developments in the intellectual and political landscape of food sovereignty advocacy over the past two decades has been the progressive juridification of food sovereignty claims: the translation of what began as a movement demand and a political aspiration into a set of legal claims that can be advanced in judicial and quasi-judicial forums at both the national and international levels. This development has engaged some of the most creative and most politically acute legal minds in the fields of international human rights law, constitutional law, and environmental law, and it has produced a body of jurisprudence and legal scholarship that provides important resources for thinking about the legal dimensions of Mazhar's agrarian theory.

The juridification of food sovereignty began in international law with the recognition of the right to food as a fundamental human right, established in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and elaborated through the work of UN Special Rapporteurs on the Right to Food, beginning with Jean Ziegler's inaugural interpretation and continuing through the mandates of subsequent rapporteurs. The Special Rapporteurs' interpretations of the right to food progressively expanded its content from a narrow right of individuals to access adequate food to a broader framework that encompasses the right of communities to govern their food systems, the right of farmers to access seeds and agricultural resources, and the obligation of states to regulate corporate actors whose behavior threatens the food security of vulnerable communities.

The food sovereignty approach has been characterized as an "epistemic shift" in which value relations, approaches to rights, and a shift from an economic to an ecological calculus concurrently challenge the rules and relations of a corporate or neoliberal food regime, with specific elements including food regimes, rights-based and citizenship approaches to food sovereignty, a new trade regime, agrarian reform, a shift to agroecological production practices, attention to gender relations and equity, and the protection of intellectual and indigenous property rights. [Pace University](#) This characterization resonates directly with Mazhar's analysis of what genuine agricultural transformation would require.

The constitutional dimension of food sovereignty is particularly important for Mazhar's jurisprudential analysis. Several countries, particularly in Latin America, have incorporated explicit provisions recognizing food sovereignty into their national constitutions. Ecuador's 2008 constitution, which drew on the indigenous philosophical concept of Sumak Kawsay (Buen Vivir or good living) to articulate a radically alternative vision of the relationship between human communities and the natural world, represents the most ambitious attempt to constitutionalize food sovereignty and to give it concrete legal force through constitutional adjudication.

The Ecuadorian constitutional innovation is philosophically significant in a way that connects directly to Mazhar's theoretical framework. The recognition of nature as a rights-bearing subject, which the Ecuadorian constitution pioneered, reflects a philosophical position that resonates strongly with the ecological philosophy embedded in the Baul and Fakiri traditions that Mazhar draws on: the conviction that the natural world is not merely a resource to be managed by human beings but a living community of beings with their own integrity and their own claims, and that the human community's relationship to the natural world is constitutively ethical rather than merely instrumental.

6.2 The Constitutional Framework for Seed Rights in Bangladesh

The legal framework governing seeds and plant variety protection in Bangladesh has been shaped by the intersection of international trade law obligations, particularly the TRIPS Agreement's provisions on intellectual property, international biodiversity law, including the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Nagoya Protocol, and the domestic constitutional and legislative framework through which these international obligations are implemented and through which the competing claims of farming communities, commercial seed producers, and the public interest are negotiated.

Mazhar's jurisprudential analysis of this framework begins with the constitutional text. The 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh, as amended, contains provisions that are potentially highly relevant to the question of seed rights, though they have rarely been invoked in the specific context of agricultural biodiversity and farmers' rights. Article 16's mandate that the state shall make provision for public health and agriculture, Article 18's provision for improving public health, and Article 23's cultural heritage protection provisions all provide potential constitutional anchoring points for claims about the rights of farming communities over their biological heritage and their agricultural knowledge systems.

The constitutional right to life, guaranteed by Article 32 of the Constitution, has been interpreted by Bangladeshi courts, following the precedent of the Indian Supreme Court's expansive interpretation of the same right, to include not merely the right to physical survival but the right to live with dignity and to have access to the conditions necessary for a dignified human existence. This expansive interpretation of the right to life provides a constitutional foundation for arguing that the destruction of agricultural biodiversity and the erosion of farming communities' rights over their seeds threatens not merely economic interests but the constitutional right to a dignified life that adequate food, nutritional diversity, and agricultural self-determination are necessary to sustain.

The specific constitutional challenge that Mazhar and UBINIG have advanced against legislative frameworks that threaten seed sovereignty draws on the theory of unconstitutional delegation: the argument that when the state effectively transfers control over a fundamental social resource from the public domain to private commercial actors without adequate compensation or democratic justification, it violates the constitutional principle that the state holds certain goods in trust for the people and may not alienate that trust by privatizing what properly belongs to the public as a whole. The genetic heritage of Bangladesh's agricultural biodiversity, accumulated through thousands of years of farming community labor, is precisely such a trust resource, and the legal framework that permits its appropriation by commercial plant breeders without consent or compensation is, in Mazhar's analysis, constitutionally suspect on precisely this ground.

6.3 International Trade Law and the Constraints on Seed Sovereignty

The international trade law framework, and particularly the obligations that Bangladesh has assumed under the TRIPS Agreement through its membership of the World Trade Organization, represents one of the most significant constraints on the domestic legal framework for seed rights. TRIPS Article 27.3(b) requires WTO members to provide intellectual property protection for plant varieties either through patents or through an effective *sui generis* system, and the UPOV-based model that most developed countries use as the reference point for what constitutes an "effective" system has been extensively criticized by farmers' rights advocates and food sovereignty scholars as biased toward the interests of commercial plant breeders and against the interests of farming communities.

Bangladesh, as a least-developed country, has benefited from transition provisions that have delayed the full implementation of TRIPS obligations, but the pressure to implement a UPOV-compatible plant variety protection system has been continuous and is a central concern of the ongoing political struggle over seed policy in Bangladesh. Mazhar's jurisprudential analysis of this pressure addresses both the legal question of what Bangladesh's international obligations actually require and the political question of how the leverage available to developing and least-developed countries in international trade law negotiations should be used to secure more favorable conditions for the protection of farmers' rights.

On the legal question, Mazhar's analysis draws on the considerable body of scholarly work that has demonstrated the flexibility available to developing countries in implementing TRIPS Article 27.3(b). The phrase "effective *sui generis* system" is not defined by TRIPS and has been interpreted by the most careful legal scholars as leaving significant space for developing

countries to design plant variety protection systems that diverge substantially from the UPOV model and that incorporate protections for farmers' rights that UPOV systems do not provide. Countries like India, which adopted a sui generis plant variety protection system under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act of 2001 that explicitly incorporates both commercial breeders' rights and farmers' rights within a single legal framework, provide important precedents for the kind of alternative approach that Mazhar argues Bangladesh should adopt.

On the political question, Mazhar's analysis is more radical. He argues that the TRIPS Agreement itself, as it applies to plant varieties, represents a fundamental injustice that should be challenged at the level of international law rather than merely accommodated within its existing framework. The agreement was negotiated in a context in which the interests of the commercial seed and agrochemical industry, particularly the major US and European transnational corporations, exercised enormous influence over the negotiating positions of the developed country governments that secured the intellectual property provisions of TRIPS. The interests of the farming communities of the Global South, who had created the biological resources that the commercial seed industry was seeking to appropriate, were not represented at the negotiating table. The resulting framework is therefore not the product of a genuinely multilateral process of norm creation but of a structured inequality of power in which the most powerful actors secured rules that served their interests at the expense of the most vulnerable.

This analysis of TRIPS as a product of structured power inequality rather than genuinely multilateral norm creation is directly relevant to the theory of international constitutionalism and democratic legitimacy that has become an important concern of contemporary international law scholarship. If the legitimacy of international legal norms depends on the democratic quality of the processes through which they are created, and if the TRIPS negotiations were structured in ways that systematically excluded the perspectives and the interests of the communities most affected by the agreement's intellectual property provisions, then the claim of those provisions to legitimate binding force is significantly weakened, at least from the standpoint of a democratic theory of international law.

6.4 The Rights of Nature and Ecological Jurisprudence

The most philosophically ambitious dimension of Mazhar's jurisprudential engagement with the agrarian question is his argument for what might be called an ecological jurisprudence: a legal framework that recognizes the rights of the natural world as such, and not merely the rights of human communities to access and benefit from natural resources. This argument connects his agrarian theory to the most recent and most radical developments in environmental law and environmental philosophy, including the rights of nature movement that has gained increasing legal recognition in multiple jurisdictions over the past decade.

The intellectual foundations of ecological jurisprudence are found in the work of thinkers like Thomas Berry, who argued that the universe is a community of subjects rather than a collection of objects, and that the rights of human persons cannot be properly understood in isolation from the rights of the other members of the natural community of which they are part. Berry's concept of the "rights of the earth community" has been developed in legal terms by Cormac Cullinan

and others in the tradition of wild law, and has found concrete legal expression in the constitutional provisions of Ecuador and Bolivia, in the Whanganui River Act of New Zealand, and in a growing number of other legal instruments that have conferred legal personhood or rights-bearing status on specific natural entities.

Mazhar's engagement with this tradition is mediated through his engagement with the indigenous philosophical traditions of the Bengal delta, and particularly with the Baul and Fakiri understanding of the relationship between the human and the non-human natural world. The Baul concept of the relationship between the *maner manush*, the inner person, and the *prakriti*, the natural world, involves a recognition of the mutual constitution of the human and the natural, a recognition that the inner life of the person is not separable from the outer life of the natural world in which that person is embedded. This philosophical position is not merely a cultural curiosity; it is, as Mazhar has argued, a sophisticated philosophical position that converges in important respects with the most advanced ecological philosophy of the contemporary period, and that deserves to be taken seriously in the construction of a legal framework adequate to the ecological crisis of our time.

The implication of this philosophical position for the specific question of seed rights and agrarian biodiversity is significant. If the biological diversity of the agricultural landscape is not merely a resource belonging to farming communities but a dimension of the natural world with its own integrity and its own claims, then the legal framework governing that diversity cannot be adequately constructed in terms of human rights alone. It requires a framework that recognizes the rights of the species themselves, of the ecological systems of which they are components, and of the evolutionary processes through which they have been created and through which they continue to develop. A genuinely adequate seed rights framework, in Mazhar's philosophical analysis, must be grounded in ecological jurisprudence of this kind, rather than in the more limited framework of human rights and intellectual property law that currently governs the field.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE METABOLIC RIFT, ECOLOGICAL CRISIS, AND THE AGRARIAN ALTERNATIVE

7.1 Climate Change, Agro-Biodiversity, and the Politics of Vulnerability

The relationship between agricultural biodiversity and the capacity of farming communities to adapt to climate change has become one of the most urgently practical dimensions of the food sovereignty debate in the years since Mazhar's first systematic articulation of the theoretical case for biodiversity conservation. The climate science of the past decade has documented with increasing precision the likely impacts of climate change on agricultural systems in South Asia, and these projected impacts have in many cases confirmed and in some cases exceeded the predictions that ecological agriculture advocates had been making on the basis of theoretical reasoning alone.

Bangladesh, given its geography and its level of economic development, is among the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world. The projected impacts of climate change on

Bangladesh's agriculture include increased frequency and intensity of flooding, more severe drought periods in northern and northwestern districts, rising sea levels and associated salinization of coastal agricultural lands, increased temperatures that reduce rice yields and increase the severity of crop disease, and disruptions to monsoon patterns that undermine the water management systems on which much of the country's agriculture depends. The ability of Bangladesh's farming communities to adapt to these changes will depend critically on the diversity of genetic resources available to them: diverse traditional varieties that include among their number types adapted to waterlogging, to drought stress, to salinity, to elevated temperatures, and to the particular combinations of stress that climate change will bring.

Mazhar's argument that the erosion of agricultural biodiversity by the Green Revolution and its successors is not merely a cultural loss but an existential threat to Bangladesh's long-term food security has thus been confirmed by the climate science in terms that even the most sceptical development economists can no longer dismiss. The varieties that Nayakrishi Andolon has been recovering, maintaining, and reintroducing for three decades include many that have precisely the stress tolerance characteristics that climate change adaptation will require. The community seed banks that the movement has established represent, in this light, not merely cultural heritage collections but critical infrastructure for agricultural resilience in the face of the most serious environmental challenge that Bangladesh has ever faced.

This convergence between the long-standing theoretical arguments of the food sovereignty movement and the emerging practical imperatives of climate change adaptation represents one of the most significant intellectual and political vindications of Mazhar's intellectual project. The argument that biodiversity conservation and ecological agriculture are prerequisites for agricultural sustainability has moved from the margins to something approaching the center of the international agricultural policy debate, driven less by the persuasive power of the argument in isolation than by the increasingly undeniable evidence that industrial monoculture systems are fragile in the face of climate variability and that diversity is the fundamental mechanism of resilience at every scale of biological and social organization.

7.2 Soil, Water, and the Long-Term Reproduction of Agricultural Capacity

The relationship between agricultural practice and the long-term reproduction of soil fertility and water availability is another dimension of Mazhar's agrarian theory that has been given greater urgency by recent scientific developments. The concept of planetary boundaries, introduced by the Stockholm Resilience Centre in 2009 and developed through subsequent research, identifies soil degradation and freshwater use as among the most critical dimensions of the boundary conditions within which human civilization must operate if it is to remain sustainable over the long term. The evidence that industrial agriculture as currently practiced is operating far outside these boundaries, mining soil fertility and depleting aquifers at rates that cannot be sustained, provides powerful support for the claim that the transition to ecological agriculture is not merely a matter of social justice or cultural preservation but of long-term civilizational survival.

Mazhar's engagement with these questions combines the philosophical argument about the relationship between human communities and the natural world with the practical analysis of specific agricultural practices and their ecological consequences. His critique of the Green

Revolution's approach to soil fertility management, which relies on synthetic nitrogen fertilizers that provide immediate yield stimulation at the cost of long-term soil degradation, and his analysis of the superior ecological rationality of the biological nitrogen cycling that diverse cropping systems maintain, draw on both the ecological science of soil biology and the practical experience of Nayakrishi Andolon farmers who have observed the progressive recovery of soil health in fields managed with ecological methods after years of chemical farming.

The analysis of water management represents another dimension of this argument. The Green Revolution's approach to irrigation, based on the extraction of groundwater through tube wells and the management of irrigation water as a commodity to be efficiently allocated through market mechanisms, has generated in Bangladesh, as in other parts of South Asia, a serious and deepening crisis of groundwater depletion that threatens the long-term viability of irrigated agriculture in many districts. The traditional water management systems of the delta, which managed water through complex collective institutions that distributed access while maintaining aquifer recharge, were systematically displaced by the tube well-based system, and their recovery or replacement with ecologically sound alternatives is one of the most urgent tasks facing Bangladeshi agriculture.

7.3 The Agrarian Question and Urbanization: Rural-Urban Relations in Crisis

The philosophical and political framework that Mazhar has developed for the analysis of agrarian questions is not confined to the specific problems of farming communities; it extends to the analysis of the broader political economy of the relationship between rural and urban Bangladesh, a relationship that has been profoundly transformed by the rapid urbanization of recent decades and by the industrial development model centered on the garment industry that has driven that urbanization.

The movement of rural poor to urban industrial employment, which has been the dominant demographic trend of Bangladesh's recent development, has complex and contradictory implications for the agrarian question. On one hand, it has reduced the extreme poverty of many individuals who have found relatively stable employment in the garment industry. On the other hand, it has contributed to the depopulation of rural areas, the abandonment of agricultural knowledge and practice, and the disruption of the social institutions through which ecological agricultural traditions were maintained. The villages that have lost half their population to urban migration are often unable to sustain the community-based institutions, the collective labor practices, and the social networks through which ecological agriculture and seed diversity management were maintained.

Mazhar's analysis of this transformation is not a nostalgic lament for a lost rural order. He is clear that the conditions of rural poverty that drove migration were themselves products of an unjust agrarian structure, and that the dignified livelihoods of rural people require transformation rather than preservation of that structure. But he argues that the specific form that Bangladesh's industrialization has taken, based on the extreme exploitation of cheap female labor in export-oriented garment production, represents an accumulation model that reproduces structural dependency on global commodity chains while failing to build the endogenous productive capacity and the social institutions of an ecologically and socially sustainable development path.

The alternative vision that Mazhar's agrarian theory implies for the relationship between rural and urban Bangladesh is one in which genuine ecological agriculture, organized around the knowledge and the institutions of farming communities, provides not merely food security but the foundation of a more diversified and more locally rooted development model. This vision draws on the tradition of thinking about the relationship between agriculture and non-agricultural production that runs from the agrarian socialism of the nineteenth century through the Gandhian vision of village-based development to the contemporary discussions of degrowth and relocalization. It is a vision that is deeply unfashionable in the world of mainstream development economics, but that has become increasingly compelling in the light of the ecological crisis and the social fragilities that the dominant model of export-oriented industrial development has generated.

CHAPTER EIGHT: GLOBAL MOVEMENTS, DIGITAL BIOPIRACY, AND THE FUTURE OF SEED SOVEREIGNTY

8.1 La Via Campesina and the International Food Sovereignty Movement

Mazhar's agrarian theory has developed in continuous dialogue with the international food sovereignty movement, and particularly with La Via Campesina, the global federation of peasants, small farmers, rural women, indigenous peoples, and agricultural workers that has been the primary political vehicle for the articulation and advancement of food sovereignty as a global political demand since its founding in 1993. The philosophical and political convergence between Mazhar's theoretical framework and the theoretical framework articulated by La Via Campesina is significant and deserves systematic attention.

The concept of food sovereignty as articulated by La Via Campesina in the Nyéléni Declaration of 2007, which defines it as the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems, aligns closely with the theoretical framework that Mazhar had been developing in Bangladesh for more than a decade before the Nyéléni forum. The six pillars of food sovereignty that the declaration articulates, focusing on food for people, on valuing food providers, on localizing food systems, on local control, on building knowledge and skills, and on working with nature, correspond precisely to the dimensions of the alternative agricultural vision that Nayakrishi Andolon has been pursuing in practice.

The food sovereignty framework, as promoted by La Via Campesina, affirms that food is a basic human right as opposed to a commodity, demands a radical, multicultural, and less-statist conceptualization of human rights, and calls for new and collective human rights such as rights to land, seeds, water, and biodiversity, the right to produce food, and the right to food sovereignty, thus creating links with the human rights movement while expanding its boundaries. [Resilience](#) This framework is directly compatible with, and in several respects anticipated by, Mazhar's theoretical work.

The dialogue between Mazhar's work and La Via Campesina's framework also reveals productive tensions that have generated important theoretical development. La Via Campesina's framework has at times been criticized from within the food sovereignty movement for insufficient attention to the class dimensions of agricultural inequality, for a tendency to idealize the peasant or small farmer as a social category without adequate attention to the internal class differentiation and the internal power relations within farming communities, and for an insufficient engagement with the feminist dimensions of agrarian politics. Mazhar's theoretical framework addresses some of these limitations more directly than the mainstream La Via Campesina discourse, particularly in its feminist analysis of women's role as primary knowledge holders and its attention to the internal social relations of farming communities as a terrain of political contestation as well as solidarity.

8.2 Digital Sequence Information, Biotechnology, and the New Frontier of Biopiracy

The emergence of digital sequence information as a central issue in international biodiversity law represents one of the most significant new developments in the politics of seed sovereignty, and one that Mazhar's theoretical framework is well positioned to address even though it postdates the original formulation of his agrarian theory by several decades. Digital sequence information, or DSI, refers to the genetic sequence data derived from biological resources that is increasingly at the center of both commercial plant biotechnology and international scientific research on biodiversity.

The controversy over DSI concerns whether the information derived from genetic sequences should be treated as part of the resource over which the provider country and the traditional community have sovereign rights and benefit-sharing entitlements under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Nagoya Protocol, or whether it should be treated as information that, once made publicly available in scientific databases, enters the public domain and can be used by anyone without consent or compensation. The commercial biotechnology industry, which has invested heavily in the computational analysis of genetic data and in the development of new varieties and products based on that analysis, argues strongly for the latter position. The countries and communities of the Global South, whose genetic resources provide the raw material for much of this analysis, argue with equal force for the former.

The concept of "biocultural metadata" has emerged in this debate as a way of recognizing that digital sequence information is not merely a string of genetic code but an encoded extension of the traditional knowledge held by farmers who developed the landraces from which that information was derived, and Global South countries including India, Brazil, and nations in Africa are increasingly seeking to classify such data as protected intellectual property under national laws as a way of bypassing the deadlock in international negotiations. [Down To Earth](#)

This development directly validates the theoretical argument that Mazhar has been making for decades about the inseparability of biological material and knowledge. The traditional crop varieties that farmers developed are not merely biological objects; they are biological objects that carry within their genetic structure the embodied intelligence of farming communities' long engagement with specific ecological conditions. When commercial biotechnology companies extract the genetic sequences of those varieties and use them in the development of new

commercial products, they are not merely using biological material; they are using the accumulated knowledge of communities that had no say in the terms on which their knowledge would be used and that receive no compensation for the use that is made of it.

The most recent developments in this area, occurring in 2025 and 2026, have significantly raised the political stakes of the DSI debate. African and Latin American countries have been considering withdrawal from the Multilateral System of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture if the system does not include DSI benefit-sharing arrangements, with growing consensus within the African Group that if the Multilateral System version two does not include DSI, vulnerable genetic collections will be moved out of the treaty framework entirely, with Latin American countries including Peru and Colombia signaling that their participation in any open access regime is conditional on recognition of biocultural metadata. [Down To Earth](#)

This political development represents a potentially transformative moment in the governance of the global biological commons, and its implications for Bangladesh and for the specific concerns that Mazhar has been advancing are significant. A restructuring of the international framework that genuinely recognized the rights of farming communities over their genetic heritage, that provided meaningful benefit-sharing for the use of traditional varieties in commercial biotechnology, and that restored sovereignty over biological resources to the communities that created them, would represent a historic vindication of the theoretical framework that Mazhar has been developing for more than four decades.

8.3 Agroecology and the Science-Policy Interface

The relationship between agroecology as a scientific discipline and the political advocacy of food sovereignty movements is one of the most intellectually productive and politically significant developments in the agrarian debate of the past decade. Agroecology, which began as a relatively specialized subdiscipline of ecology concerned with the application of ecological principles to the design and management of agricultural systems, has evolved into a much broader intellectual and political framework that provides scientific support for many of the practical approaches advocated by the food sovereignty movement and that challenges the scientific foundations of the industrial agricultural model.

The political significance of agroecology lies partly in the fact that it provides scientific legitimacy for approaches to agricultural production that had previously been dismissed by mainstream agricultural science as unproductive or impractical. The growing body of scientific evidence that agroecological systems, properly designed and managed, can match or approach the caloric yields of industrial systems while providing significantly superior environmental, nutritional, and social outcomes has been an important resource for food sovereignty advocates in their arguments with development institutions and governments that continue to prioritize yield maximization as the primary criterion of agricultural success.

Mazhar's agrarian theory has contributed to the development of agroecology as a framework in ways that go beyond the purely scientific. His insistence on the epistemological dimension of the agrarian question, his argument that the knowledge systems of farming communities are

scientifically valid and deserve recognition as legitimate forms of knowing, has helped to shape the understanding of agroecology as a genuinely transdisciplinary field that draws on both formal scientific knowledge and the traditional ecological knowledge of farming communities. The concept of "co-production of knowledge" that is increasingly central to agroecological theory and practice, the idea that genuine advances in agricultural understanding require the collaborative engagement of scientific researchers and farming communities as co-producers of knowledge rather than the unidirectional transmission of scientific knowledge to passive farming beneficiaries, reflects the epistemological principles that Mazhar has articulated.

Recent scholarship published in early 2026 has argued that the metabolic rift framework, the food sovereignty framework, and the framework of critical agrarian studies remain underdeveloped in their theoretical connections, but that strengthening the nexus among these frameworks enriches each of them, fostering political practice, with the food sovereignty movement's six pillars providing a concrete path to repair the metabolic rift by fostering local production and resource circulation. [Taylor & Francis Online](#) This convergence of the most recent theoretical work with the framework that Mazhar has been developing for four decades is a measure of the prophetic quality of his agrarian vision.

CHAPTER NINE: AGRARIAN THEORY AND REVOLUTIONARY POLITICS

9.1 The Agrarian Question and the Theory of Constituent Power

The connection between Mazhar's agrarian theory and his broader political theory, and specifically the theory of constituent power and popular sovereignty that was analyzed in Part Five, is one of the most original and intellectually productive aspects of his intellectual project. The connection is not immediately obvious: agrarian theory and constitutional theory appear to belong to different intellectual registers, addressing different practical questions with different analytical tools. But Mazhar insists on the connection, and his insistence is theoretically justified by a set of arguments that deserve careful attention.

The argument begins with the observation that the question of who controls the resources necessary for the material reproduction of a community, who owns the land, who has access to water, who controls the seeds, who determines the terms on which agricultural knowledge is produced and circulated, is not merely an economic question but a constitutional question in the deepest sense of that word. A constitution, in the tradition of republican political theory from Aristotle through Rousseau to Hannah Arendt and beyond, is not merely a set of legal rules for the organization of government. It is the fundamental arrangement of a community's social and political life, the basic structure through which power is distributed, through which collective decisions are made, and through which the conditions of freedom and dignity for all members of the community are either secured or denied.

If we understand the constitution in this broad sense, then the question of agrarian structure is a constitutional question. A community in which the great majority of the population cannot access the land and biological resources necessary to sustain their material lives without subjecting

themselves to terms dictated by a small propertied class is not a democratic community in any substantive sense, regardless of the formal democratic machinery of elections and representative institutions that it may possess. The agrarian question is, in this analysis, the material foundation of the constitutional question, and no constitutional settlement that does not address the distribution of agrarian resources and the rights of farming communities over their biological heritage can be genuinely democratic.

This argument connects directly to the theory of constituent power that Mazhar developed in *Gono-Ovyutthan o Gathan*, the 2023 book that was so influential in shaping the ideological framework of the 2024 uprising. The constituent power of the people, the foundational power to establish and re-establish the basic structure of political community, includes the power to determine the fundamental terms on which natural and biological resources are held and governed. A genuine exercise of constituent power by the people of Bangladesh, in Mazhar's analysis, would require not merely the drafting of a new constitutional text but the fundamental restructuring of the agrarian order in ways that give farming communities genuine sovereignty over their land, their seeds, their water, and their agricultural knowledge.

9.2 Land Reform and the Unfinished Agrarian Revolution

The question of land reform, which has been a central demand of the Bangladeshi left since the country's founding and which has remained largely unfulfilled across five decades of political change, is one of the most concrete political dimensions of Mazhar's agrarian theory. Bangladesh's agrarian structure is characterized by extreme inequality: a small number of relatively large landowners control a disproportionate share of agricultural land, while the vast majority of farming families operate tiny plots, many of them below the minimum viable size for subsistence farming, and a large proportion of the rural population are effectively landless, dependent on agricultural wage labor for their survival.

This inequality of land distribution is not merely an economic fact; it is a political and constitutional fact, a reflection of the distribution of power in Bangladeshi rural society and an index of the degree to which the formal democratic institutions of the state represent the interests of the rural majority. The failure of successive Bangladeshi governments, including governments that came to power with explicit commitments to land reform, to implement meaningful redistribution of agricultural land reflects the degree to which agrarian elites continue to exercise decisive influence over political processes that nominally operate through universal suffrage and representative democracy.

Mazhar's analysis of this failure draws on the theory of what the Gramscian tradition calls "passive revolution": the process through which dominant social groups accommodate the demands of subordinate groups for political change by granting formal constitutional and institutional reforms while preserving the material foundations of their dominance. The political changes of 1971, which established Bangladesh as an independent nation-state with a formally democratic constitution, did not address the agrarian structure that had concentrated land in the hands of rural elites under both British colonial and Pakistani rule. The formal democratic institutions of the new state were built on an agrarian foundation that structurally limited their genuine democratic character.

This analysis of the limits of formal democracy without agrarian transformation connects Mazhar's theory directly to the most important traditions of revolutionary agrarian thought, from Lenin's analysis of the land question in the Russian Revolution through Mao's analysis of the centrality of the peasantry in the Chinese revolutionary process to the Latin American experience of agrarian reform movements in Mexico, Bolivia, Cuba, and Chile. In each of these cases, the question of whether genuine democratic transformation could be achieved without addressing the agrarian question was answered, in different ways and with different outcomes, by the political movements of the twentieth century.

Mazhar's contribution to this tradition is to situate it within the specific conditions of contemporary Bangladesh, attending to the ways in which the agrarian question has been transformed by globalization, by the Green Revolution, by the environmental crisis, and by the specific cultural and philosophical resources of the Bengali farming tradition. His is not a mechanical application of revolutionary agrarian theory to the Bangladeshi context; it is a genuinely original theoretical synthesis that draws on that tradition while subjecting it to critical revision in the light of the specific conditions of postcolonial Bangladesh in the twenty-first century.

9.3 The Post-2024 Moment and Agrarian Political Opportunity

The political transformation initiated by the uprising of July-August 2024, which brought down the Sheikh Hasina government and created a political opening for the kind of fundamental restructuring of Bangladeshi political and constitutional life that Mazhar has advocated for decades, has also created new possibilities and new urgencies for the agrarian dimension of his political vision. The interim government that came to power in the aftermath of the uprising has been focused primarily on the political and constitutional dimensions of the transition, but the agrarian questions that Mazhar has been raising remain as urgent and as unresolved as they were before the uprising.

The political opening created by 2024 is significant for the agrarian agenda in several respects. The collapse of the Awami League government removed from power the political force that had been most directly implicated in the agricultural policies, including the promotion of hybrid and genetically modified seed varieties, the weakening of farmers' rights over traditional seeds, and the prioritization of commercial agricultural interests over the interests of small farming communities, that Mazhar has most consistently opposed. The new political environment, in which the demands of the movement that overthrew the Hasina government have not yet been consolidated into a stable political settlement, creates space for the articulation and advocacy of alternative agrarian visions that was not available under the conditions of the previous government's dominance.

At the same time, the post-2024 political environment presents significant risks for the agrarian agenda. The political forces that have been most influential in shaping the post-uprising political landscape include some that are sympathetic to and some that are deeply hostile to the food sovereignty and agrarian democracy perspectives that Mazhar advocates. The fragility of the political transition, the urgency of economic stabilization concerns, and the continued influence of international development institutions that are skeptical of or hostile to food sovereignty

approaches all represent obstacles to the advancement of a genuine agrarian reform agenda in the post-2024 political environment.

Mazhar's own engagement with the post-2024 political moment on the agrarian question has been, characteristically, both principled and creative. He has insisted on the connection between the constitutional agenda and the agrarian agenda, arguing that no genuine constitutional transformation can occur without addressing the agrarian foundations of power in Bangladeshi society. He has advanced specific demands for the legal recognition of community seed banks, for the revision of the legal framework governing plant variety protection to incorporate genuine farmers' rights, for the constitutional recognition of food sovereignty, and for the redistribution of agricultural land in favor of landless and marginal farming communities. And he has continued to build the organizational capacity of Nayakrishi Andolon as the practical vehicle for demonstrating, at the community level, that the alternative agrarian vision he advocates is not merely theoretically coherent but practically achievable.

9.4 The Intellectual Legacy: Agrarian Theory in the Twenty-First Century

The intellectual legacy of Mazhar's agrarian theory extends well beyond the specific context of Bangladesh and the specific political struggles of the food sovereignty movement in South Asia. It represents a contribution to the broader intellectual project of developing an adequate theoretical framework for understanding and responding to the agrarian dimensions of the global ecological and social crisis of the twenty-first century, a framework that can engage with the complexity of that crisis, with the diversity of the social and cultural formations within which it is experienced, and with the enormous range of practical and political interventions through which communities around the world are attempting to construct alternatives to the industrial agricultural order.

The distinctive philosophical character of Mazhar's contribution to this broader intellectual project lies in his insistence on the simultaneity of the philosophical, the ecological, the economic, the political, and the cultural dimensions of the agrarian question. In an intellectual landscape that tends to fragment the analysis of agrarian questions into specialized disciplinary silos, with economists analyzing market structures and welfare impacts, ecologists analyzing ecosystem services and biodiversity loss, political scientists analyzing policy processes and social movements, and philosophers analyzing the conceptual and ethical dimensions of food and farming, Mazhar's synthetic approach represents a genuine and valuable alternative.

His ability to move between the metaphysics of the seed and the politics of the WTO TRIPS agreement, between the spiritual ecology of the Baul tradition and the statistics of agro-biodiversity loss, between the philosophical analysis of tacit knowledge and the organizational details of community seed bank governance, between the theory of constituent power and the practice of farmer experimentation: this synthetic intellectual capacity is not merely a stylistic feature of his work. It reflects a genuine philosophical conviction that the agrarian question cannot be adequately understood in any of these dimensions taken in isolation, that the genuine complexity of the question demands a form of thinking that refuses disciplinary confinement and insists on the interconnections that specialization obscures.

This philosophical conviction about the interconnectedness of the agrarian question and all the other questions that it touches is itself, in a sense, the deepest expression of the ecological philosophy that animates Mazhar's agrarian theory. Just as the ecological understanding of an agricultural system requires attention to the interconnections among its biological, chemical, hydrological, and social components, the intellectual understanding of the agrarian question requires attention to the interconnections among its philosophical, political, economic, cultural, and ecological dimensions. The method of thinking is an expression of the ecological worldview: diversity, interconnection, and systemic thinking at every scale.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION TO PART SEVEN: THE EARTH AS PHILOSOPHICAL TEXT

The examination of Farhad Mazhar's agrarian theory in this part of the textbook has revealed a body of thought of remarkable depth, coherence, and consequence. From the philosophical foundations in the critique of epistemological hierarchy and the Marxist analysis of the metabolic rift, through the empirical analysis of the Green Revolution's ecological and social costs, through the development of an alternative epistemological framework that recognizes farmer knowledge as a sophisticated and scientifically valid form of knowing, through the specific institutional innovations of Nayakrishi Andolon's community seed banks and ecological agricultural practices, through the jurisprudential analysis of the international and domestic legal framework for seed rights, through the engagement with the global movements of food sovereignty and their most recent developments in 2024, 2025, and 2026, and through the articulation of the connection between agrarian theory and the theory of revolutionary democratic politics: at every level and in every dimension, we have encountered a body of thought that is philosophically serious, politically courageous, and practically grounded in a way that is rare in any intellectual tradition.

The central philosophical claim of Mazhar's agrarian theory, to which all its other dimensions are connected, is the claim that the earth is not merely a resource to be managed but a text to be read, a living philosophical document in which the wisdom of ten thousand years of human agricultural practice is encoded in biological form. The seed is the sentence. The variety is the word. The ecosystem is the library. And the farming community is both the scribe and the reader, simultaneously the custodian of a text that it did not originate and the author of the text that future generations will inherit.

This philosophical metaphor, which is not merely a metaphor but a theoretical claim about the nature of biological inheritance and agricultural knowledge, has radical implications for the way we think about the rights and obligations of the present generation in relation to the biological heritage of the past and the agricultural possibilities of the future. It implies that the destruction of agricultural biodiversity is not merely an ecological loss but a philosophical catastrophe, a burning of the library of ten thousand years of human agrarian civilization. It implies that the appropriation of traditional crop varieties by commercial plant breeders without the consent or compensation of the communities that created them is not merely an economic injustice but a form of cultural and intellectual theft of the most fundamental kind. And it implies that the

recovery, maintenance, and transmission of that biological heritage is not merely a technical task of seed conservation but a philosophical and political act, an assertion of the rights of farming communities over their biological and cultural inheritance and an act of solidarity with the farmers of the future who will need that inheritance to navigate the ecological crises that our civilization is creating.

The extraordinary achievement of Nayakrishi Andolon, sustained over more than three decades against enormous structural pressures and in the face of persistent skepticism from both the development establishment and the mainstream political left, is the demonstration that this philosophical vision is not merely theoretically coherent but practically achievable. The community seed banks of Tangail and Pabna and the other districts where the movement has established its deepest roots are not merely agricultural institutions; they are philosophical statements about what it means to live well in and with the natural world, about the obligations of communities to their biological heritage and to future generations, and about the possibility of constructing, within the interstices of a global agrarian capitalism that is systematically destroying the conditions of sustainable agricultural life, islands of ecological and social rationality that embody a genuinely alternative vision of the relationship between humanity and the earth.

The relationship between this vision and the political upheavals of 2024 Bangladesh remains to be fully worked out. The uprising brought to the surface of Bangladeshi political life a set of democratic demands and a constituency of politically energized young people who are, in principle, open to a genuinely transformative political agenda. Whether the agrarian dimensions of that transformation, the fundamental restructuring of the relationships between farming communities and the land, the seeds, the water, and the knowledge that constitute the material basis of their lives, will find adequate expression in the constitutional moment that the uprising has opened, is a question that remains open and that will depend in significant part on the continued organizational and intellectual work of movements like Nayakrishi Andolon and on the continued theoretical articulation and political advocacy of thinkers like Farhad Mazhar.

The stakes of this question, as should be clear from the analysis in this part of the textbook, extend far beyond Bangladesh. The agrarian crisis that Mazhar has been analyzing and responding to for more than four decades is a global crisis, manifested in different forms and with different intensities in different parts of the world, but rooted everywhere in the same fundamental dynamics of industrial monoculture, corporate seed monopoly, epistemological imperialism, and the systematic destruction of the biological and cultural diversity that farming communities have built over millennia. The theoretical framework that Mazhar has constructed in response to this crisis, drawing on the deepest resources of both the Bengali philosophical tradition and the international theoretical traditions he has engaged with throughout his intellectual life, represents one of the most significant intellectual contributions to the global project of constructing an alternative agricultural future that has been produced in the postcolonial world.

Part Eight of this textbook will draw together the threads of the analysis developed in all the preceding parts and will offer a systematic evaluation of Farhad Mazhar's intellectual legacy as a whole, addressing the question of what his life's work represents for the future of radical thought

in Bangladesh, for the theory and practice of alternative development in the Global South, and for the broader philosophical project of developing an adequate intellectual framework for the civilization-scale challenges of the twenty-first century.

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On Elinor Ostrom and the governance of common pool resources, the foundational text is *Governing the Commons* (1990). The application of Ostrom's framework to seed systems specifically is developed in Dejene Negassa Ayana's work and in the contributions to the volume *Seed Systems for Enhanced Food Security in Rural and Urban Africa* (2016). The more philosophical extension of the commons framework in the direction of the biological commons is developed in David Bollier's *Think Like a Commoner* (2014) and in the contributions to the volume *The Wealth of the Commons* (2012).

On agroecology as a scientific and political framework, the essential texts include Miguel Altieri's *Agroecology: The Science of Sustainable Agriculture* (1995), Peter Rosset and Miguel Altieri's *Agroecology: Science and Politics* (2017), and the report of the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) *From Uniformity to Diversity* (2016). The academic journal *Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems*, published by Taylor and Francis, provides the most important ongoing scholarly literature.

On the digital sequence information debate and its political implications, the working documents of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, the deliberations of the Governing Body of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture following the 2025 Peru negotiations, and the reports of the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development provide the essential primary sources. The emerging academic literature on DSI and sovereignty includes articles in the *Journal of International Economic Law* and the *Review of International Studies*.

The connections between agrarian theory and constitutional theory are explored in the tradition of agrarian constitutionalism associated with the Latin American constitutional movements of the 1990s and 2000s. The Ecuadorian constitution of 2008 is the most important primary source. Academic analyses include Christina Biebesheimer on rights of nature, Magdalena Correa Henao on food sovereignty and constitutional law in Latin America, and the comparative constitutional law literature on social rights and their enforceability. The rights of nature tradition is analyzed in Cormac Cullinan's *Wild Law* (2011) and in Mumta Ito's work on rights of nature as a concept in international environmental law.

Farhad Mazhar's own published works on agrarian questions, available primarily in Bengali through UBINIG and Chinta, include a series of major essays on seed sovereignty, ecological agriculture, and the political economy of the Green Revolution that were published over the period from the late 1980s to the present. His book *Krishir Rajniti* (The Politics of Agriculture), published in Bengali by UBINIG in the early 2000s, provides the most systematic single-volume presentation of his agrarian theory. The documentation reports produced by UBINIG and *Nayakrishi Andolon*, available through the organization's offices in Dhaka and Tangail, provide essential empirical material for the evaluation of the movement's practical achievements.

The connection between Mazhar's agrarian theory and the 2024 uprising and its aftermath is documented in his interviews with Bangladeshi media during the post-uprising period, in the reports of UBINIG on the post-uprising political environment and its implications for the agrarian agenda, and in the emerging academic literature on the uprising itself. The most important primary source for Mazhar's post-2024 thinking on the agrarian question is his continued engagement with the constitutional reform process through Chinta and through his public appearances and interviews in the period from August 2024 onward.

On the feminist dimensions of agrarian politics and women's role as seed custodians, the foundational texts include Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive* (1988) and Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* (1980). The specific analysis of women's seed knowledge in Bangladesh is developed in the fieldwork reports of UBINIG and in the academic work of Farida Akhter, Mazhar's long-term collaborator at UBINIG, whose contributions to the theoretical development of *Nayakrishi Andolon* deserve recognition as co-constitutive of the intellectual tradition that this chapter has analyzed.

The broader philosophical tradition of ecological jurisprudence within which Mazhar's legal arguments are embedded is represented by Thomas Berry's *The Dream of the Earth* (1988), Christopher Stone's *Should Trees Have Standing?* (1972), and the subsequent development of rights of nature legal theory by Cormac Cullinan, Mumta Ito, and others. The application of this tradition to seed rights specifically, and its connection to the indigenous philosophical traditions of the Bengal delta, is an area where Mazhar's own theoretical work represents a genuinely original contribution to the international literature that deserves much wider recognition than it has received outside of Bangladesh.

End of Part Seven. Part Eight, the concluding part of this textbook, will offer a comprehensive evaluation of Farhad Mazhar's intellectual legacy across all the dimensions examined in the preceding seven parts. It will address the question of how his work will be read by future generations, what it contributes to the theory and practice of radical politics in the postcolonial world, how it advances the philosophical project of developing an adequate intellectual framework for the crises of the twenty-first century, and what lessons it holds for thinkers and activists in Bangladesh and beyond who are committed to the project of building a world organized on principles of ecological sustainability, social justice, and genuine democratic self-governance.

PART EIGHT: THE LEGACY AND ITS FUTURE

Intellectual Inheritance, Civilizational Stakes, and the Continuing Struggle for a People's Bangladesh

PROLOGUE TO PART EIGHT: THE QUESTION OF LEGACY

To speak of the legacy of a living thinker is an act of philosophical presumption, and it is an act that Farhad Mazhar, characteristically, would almost certainly resist. He has spent a lifetime resisting premature closure, insisting on the openness of historical processes against every ideology that offers a finished account of the world, arguing that the genuinely radical imagination must remain oriented toward the future rather than satisfied with any achievement of the past. To write the final part of a biography of a man who, at the time of writing in early 2026, is still actively intervening in the most consequential political developments in the history of Bangladesh since 1971, who is still publishing essays, attending forums, challenging the constitutionalism of an interim government that in many respects he helped bring into being through the theoretical framework it drew on, and who is still insisting, as he has for five decades, that the deepest questions have not yet been answered and that the most important work lies ahead, is therefore a task that must be approached with appropriate humility.

And yet the question of legacy presses itself upon us with a force that cannot simply be deferred. The extraordinary sequence of events that has unfolded in Bangladesh between the July uprising of 2024 and the general election and constitutional referendum of February 2026 has brought Farhad Mazhar's intellectual project into a relationship with historical reality that is without precedent in his long career. A political upheaval that many observers directly attribute, in significant part, to the theoretical framework his work provided has passed through its first phase and entered a new and more complicated phase in which the tensions, contradictions, and unresolved questions of that framework are being tested against the hard realities of institutional politics, class interest, geopolitical pressure, and the irreducible complexity of governing a nation of one hundred and seventy million people in a moment of acute economic and ecological stress. The outcome of this testing, which is still unfolding and whose final shape cannot be known, will be among the most important data points for any future evaluation of what Mazhar's intellectual project ultimately achieved and what it failed to achieve.

Part Eight of this textbook approaches the question of Mazhar's legacy from several angles simultaneously. It begins with a systematic assessment of his intellectual contributions across all the domains examined in the preceding seven parts, evaluating both their philosophical originality and their practical and political consequences. It then turns to the specific and dramatic context of the post-2024 political moment in Bangladesh, analyzing how Mazhar has positioned himself in relation to the various forces and processes that the uprising unleashed, and evaluating his analysis of the constitutional transition that culminated in the February 2026 election. It examines the global resonance of his intellectual project and its contribution to the

international theoretical traditions he has engaged with and helped to transform. It addresses, honestly and without apology, the substantive criticisms and limitations of his work that a rigorous intellectual biography must acknowledge. And it concludes with a reflection on what the life and work of Farhad Mazhar teaches us about the possibilities and the costs of genuine radical intellectual engagement in the postcolonial world of the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER ONE: A SYSTEMATIC ASSESSMENT OF THE INTELLECTUAL CONTRIBUTIONS

1.1 The Philosophical Synthesis: What Has Been Achieved

The most fundamental question to be addressed in any assessment of Mazhar's intellectual legacy is whether the philosophical synthesis he has pursued throughout his career, the synthesis between the indigenous philosophical traditions of the Bengal delta and the critical theoretical traditions of modern Western thought, represents a genuine and original intellectual achievement or whether it is, as skeptics have occasionally suggested, an eclecticism that borrows from multiple traditions without genuinely integrating them into a coherent philosophical position.

The preceding seven parts of this textbook have, it is hoped, provided sufficient material for an informed judgment on this question. The judgment that emerges from a careful reading of Mazhar's work across its full range is that the synthesis is genuine, original, and philosophically important, though not without internal tensions that remain productive rather than resolved. The philosophical significance of the synthesis lies precisely in what it demonstrates about the relationship between thought and context, between universal theoretical claims and the specific conditions from which they emerge, between the tradition of Western critical theory and the alternative wisdom traditions of the colonized world.

Mazhar has demonstrated, through the sustained practice of his intellectual career rather than through any single definitive theoretical statement, that it is possible to engage seriously and rigorously with the most important theoretical traditions of the Western philosophical heritage, including Marxist political economy, Frankfurt School critical theory, poststructuralist philosophy, postcolonial theory, and the philosophy of science, without surrendering either the critical autonomy necessary to identify their limitations and contradictions or the roots in specific indigenous philosophical traditions that give one's thought its particularity and its grounding. He has shown that the encounter between these traditions need not take the form of either uncritical adoption or nostalgic rejection, that it is possible to inhabit multiple philosophical worlds simultaneously and to allow them to illuminate each other in ways that neither could achieve in isolation.

The specific philosophical contributions that emerge from this synthesis include, first, the theory of constituent power and popular sovereignty developed in *Gono-Ovyutthan o Gathan*, which brings together the Sieyesian and Schmittian traditions of European constitutional theory, the postcolonial critique of colonial constitutionalism, and the indigenous democratic traditions of the Bengali people in ways that produced a framework capable of both comprehending and to

some extent anticipating the political dynamics of the 2024 uprising. Second, the theory of peasant knowledge systems and seed sovereignty, which integrates the Marxist analysis of primitive accumulation and the metabolic rift with the postcolonial critique of epistemological violence and the indigenous philosophy of ecological wisdom that the Baul and Fakiri traditions embody, and which has produced a body of thought that is among the most philosophically sophisticated contributions to the global food sovereignty debate. Third, the theory of spiritual democracy derived from Lalon Shah's philosophical framework, which provides a genuinely original alternative to both the secular nationalist and the religious nationalist frameworks that have dominated Bangladesh's political culture, drawing on the deepest resources of the Bengali devotional tradition to articulate a vision of democratic political life grounded in the spiritual dignity and the inner freedom of every person.

These three theoretical contributions are connected by a single deep philosophical impulse: the conviction that genuine human freedom, understood comprehensively as the freedom to be fully what one is in relation to others and to the natural world, requires both the transformation of political and economic structures that deny that freedom and the recovery of the philosophical, cultural, and ecological traditions through which it has been partially realized and can be more fully realized. This conviction is not an abstract philosophical position; it is the animating principle of an intellectual project that has manifested itself simultaneously as theoretical work, as organizational practice, as poetic creation, and as political engagement, and whose unity across these diverse modalities is the most eloquent testimony to its philosophical seriousness.

1.2 The Poetic Achievement: Literature as Philosophical Act

The poetic dimension of Mazhar's intellectual legacy deserves systematic consideration in its own right, not merely as a supplement to or illustration of his theoretical work but as a philosophical achievement of independent significance. The question of how to evaluate the poetry of a thinker who is also, or perhaps primarily, a poet, raises issues about the relationship between aesthetic and intellectual value that are not resolved by any easy division of labor between literary criticism and philosophical analysis.

Mazhar's poetry, spanning more than five decades of continuous creative work, is of extraordinary diversity and formal range. It includes the early lyric poems of political and erotic intensity that established his reputation as a major voice in Bangladeshi poetry in the late 1960s and 1970s; the longer, more philosophically meditative poems of the 1980s and 1990s that engage with the questions of Bengal's spiritual traditions, of colonialism's cultural legacy, and of the relationship between the personal and the political in the life of a radical intellectual; and the more recent poems, many of them published through Chinta and circulated through digital networks, that engage directly with the political crises of the 2010s and 2020s with a combination of prophetic urgency and philosophical precision that has no easy parallel in contemporary Bengali literature.

What distinguishes Mazhar's poetry as a philosophical achievement is not merely its intellectual content, though that content is substantial and sophisticated, but the way it demonstrates, through its formal practices, the truth of the philosophical claims about the relationship between poetic thinking and conceptual thinking that he has advanced throughout his career. His best poems do

not illustrate or ornament philosophical propositions already fully formed in prose; they achieve in their poetic form insights that the prose argument approaches but cannot fully reach. The image, the rhythm, the tonal shift, the juxtaposition of the conceptually distant, the refusal of the expected closure, in his most powerful poems these are not decorative devices but epistemological ones, ways of holding in tension the complexity of experience against the simplifications that thought in any form, including poetic thought, tends to impose.

The comparison with Tagore, which has been made by several critics and which Mazhar himself has addressed with characteristic complexity, acknowledging the enormous debt to the great modernizer of Bengali literary culture while insisting on the fundamental differences in their philosophical orientations, is illuminating precisely where it breaks down. Tagore's philosophical poetry operates within a framework in which the universal and the particular, the spiritual and the political, the aesthetic and the ethical, achieve a synthesizing harmony that is itself the poem's meaning. Mazhar's philosophical poetry operates within a framework in which these tensions are not resolved but sustained, in which the poem's meaning lies not in the harmony it achieves but in the honesty with which it inhabits contradiction. This difference reflects a deeper philosophical difference about the relationship between art and reality: Tagore's idealism versus Mazhar's critical materialism, mediated through a spiritual philosophy that shares more than either poet would perhaps acknowledge with the other.

1.3 The Organizational Legacy: UBINIG, Nayakrishi Andolon, and Chinta

The institutional legacy of Farhad Mazhar's intellectual project is embodied most concretely in the three organizations that he founded or co-founded and that have served as the primary vehicles for translating his theoretical insights into practical action: UBINIG, the policy research and advocacy organization; Nayakrishi Andolon, the ecological agriculture movement; and Chinta, the journal and discussion forum.

UBINIG's legacy is measured not only by the specific policy interventions it has made and the research it has produced, but by the model of intellectual-organizational practice it represents. UBINIG has consistently embodied the conviction that serious policy research must be rooted in the experience of the communities whose lives the policies at stake affect, and that the appropriate relationship between the researcher and the researched is not one of external observation and analysis but of collaborative engagement in the production of knowledge for social transformation. This model of participatory and politically engaged research has influenced a generation of development researchers and activists in Bangladesh and has contributed to the development of similar models in the international development research community.

The legacy of Nayakrishi Andolon has been assessed in detail in Part Seven. What should be emphasized in the context of an overall evaluation of Mazhar's intellectual legacy is the degree to which the movement's practical achievements provide the empirical foundation for the theoretical claims of his agrarian philosophy. A philosophy of ecological agriculture and seed sovereignty that was purely theoretical, that argued for the value of farmer knowledge and biological diversity without any practical demonstration of what that value consists in and how it can be institutionally realized, would be philosophically interesting but intellectually incomplete.

Nayakrishi Andolon's three decades of demonstrated practical achievement transforms the theoretical claims from philosophical speculation into practically verified propositions, grounded in the observable reality of farming communities that have recovered their biological heritage and rebuilt their ecological knowledge systems with consequences that are measurable in terms of nutritional diversity, ecological health, economic resilience, and social solidarity.

The legacy of Chinta as a journal and public forum is perhaps the most difficult to evaluate quantitatively but among the most significant in terms of its long-term intellectual and political impact. The function of a critical journal in the intellectual life of a society is not simply to disseminate ideas already fully formed but to create and maintain the conditions for a kind of thinking that the dominant institutions of intellectual life, including the university, the mainstream media, and the established political organizations, do not provide. Chinta has served this function with remarkable consistency over more than three decades, creating a space in which the conventional boundaries between theoretical analysis and political advocacy, between intellectual rigidity and political commitment, between the engagement with international theoretical debates and the engagement with specific Bangladeshi political realities, could be dissolved in the pursuit of genuinely critical and genuinely practical thought.

The evidence that this function was performed with consequence is provided most dramatically by the role that the framework developed through Chinta, and crystallized in Gono-Ovyutthan o Gathan, played in shaping the political consciousness of the generation of young people who led the 2024 uprising. The journal was not merely a theoretical exercise; it was the material vehicle through which a political consciousness was formed that proved capable, at the right historical moment, of changing the course of Bangladeshi history.

CHAPTER TWO: THE POST-2024 POLITICAL MOMENT AND MAZHAR'S ENGAGEMENT

2.1 From Uprising to Transition: The Complexity of a Revolutionary Moment

The political process that began with the uprising of July and August 2024 and has continued through the formation of the Yunus-led interim government, the constitutional reform process, the July Charter of November 2025, and the combined general election and constitutional referendum of February 12, 2026, represents the most complex and consequential test that Mazhar's theoretical framework has faced in his intellectual career. The test is complex because the process has not followed the trajectory that any single theoretical framework could have predicted, and because the forces at work in it are multiple, contradictory, and in many respects opaque to any external observer, however theoretically sophisticated.

On February 12, 2026, voters in Bangladesh cast ballots in concurrent parliamentary elections and a constitutional referendum held under the Interim Government. While the Bangladesh Nationalist Party secured a two-thirds supermajority and sixty-one percent of voters endorsed the reform package, the referendum's ambiguously framed questions left unclear which of the July Charter's proposals were actually approved and what binding force they carry. [ConstitutionNet](#)

This outcome is simultaneously a vindication and a complication of the theoretical framework within which Mazhar had been operating.

It is a vindication insofar as the entire constitutional transition process, the reform commissions, the National Consensus Commission, the July Charter, the referendum, represents the kind of institutionalization of popular sovereignty that Mazhar's theory of constituent power demanded. The fact that a popular uprising was not merely negated by counterrevolution or absorbed into restored authoritarian politics, but was instead channeled, however imperfectly, into a genuine constitutional reform process that engaged significant political forces in genuine deliberation about the fundamental structure of Bangladeshi political life, represents an outcome that is more consistent with Mazhar's theoretical predictions than the outcomes of most revolutionary uprisings in recent history.

The interim government pursued the translation of uprising legitimacy into constitutional form through the National Consensus Commission, which throughout 2025 convened structured deliberations among thirty-three political parties and alliances with the aim of converting "uprising aspirations" into institutional blueprints, seeking to bridge street mobilization and constitutional design and to produce a framework capable of transforming "revolutionary" legitimacy into juridical authority. [Journal of Democracy](#) This process of translation from revolutionary to constitutional politics is precisely the process that Mazhar's theory of constituent power describes as the necessary next step after the exercise of raw constituent power in the form of mass uprising.

But the outcome is also a complication. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party, led by Tarique Rahman, won a landslide victory in the election, securing two-thirds of seats, with Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami securing the second most seats, and the election taking place as a bipolar contest between the BNP and the eleven-party alliance led by the Jamaat-e-Islami and the National Citizen Party while Hasina's Awami League was banned and could not participate. [Wikipedia](#) This outcome raises precisely the questions about the relationship between popular sovereignty and institutional politics that Mazhar's theoretical framework poses but does not fully answer. A two-thirds majority for the BNP, a party that Mazhar has consistently subjected to withering critique for its own authoritarian tendencies and its failure to represent the interests of the rural poor and the marginalized communities of Bangladesh, does not straightforwardly represent the realization of the democratic vision that his theory of constituent power articulates.

2.2 Mazhar's Assessment of the Post-Uprising Transition

Mazhar's own engagement with the post-uprising political process has been consistent with the critical independence that has characterized his intellectual career throughout. He was among the first public intellectuals to raise the question of the legitimacy of the Hasina government's resignation and the constitutional status of the interim government, and he has maintained a posture of principled critical engagement with the Yunus administration that is neither unconditional support nor straightforward opposition.

Mazhar has argued that arrangements should be made to grant full powers to the Yunus-led interim government, that the interim government should not be merely an advisory body but a

fully empowered one, that political parties must be included in the reform process to move past the interim phase, and that elections should not be held prematurely before the conditions for genuine democratic transformation have been established. [BD News 24](#) This position reflects his theoretical conviction that the constitutional moment opened by the uprising requires a period of genuine constituent deliberation that cannot be foreshortened by the electoral timetable demands of established political parties without betraying the aspirations of the uprising itself.

At the same time, Mazhar has been unsparing in his critique of the limitations and contradictions of the constitutional reform process. He has argued that the mass uprising has not led toward the creation of a new state, that Sheikh Hasina's fascist constitution has remained intact despite the change of government, that the government operating under this constitution lacks genuine legitimacy, and that law made by colonial powers cannot be confused with a people's constitution, which must emerge from the sovereign will of the people rather than from the deliberations of an unelected interim administration working within the framework of the colonial constitutional inheritance. [BD News 24](#)

This critique has become more pointed as the constitutional reform process has advanced. Mazhar has argued that building a new Bangladesh requires not merely a change of government but a new constitution that reflects the collective will of the people, that voting is not the only form of democracy but merely a process, and that the struggle against fascism requires resisting all of its forms, including those that present themselves in the guise of democracy. [The Business Standard](#) He has been equally critical of what he has identified as emerging religious nationalism in the post-uprising political environment, insisting that the struggle against the secular fascism of the Awami League must not become a vehicle for the equally dangerous alternative of religious nationalist authoritarianism.

Mazhar has argued that fascism comes in two forms, secular nationalism and religious nationalism, that these are two faces of the same nationalist ideology, and that the people of Bangladesh face both adversaries simultaneously, having already begun the fight against religious nationalism with growing public awareness of its dangers. [BD News 24](#) This analysis of the post-uprising political landscape as presenting a dual threat, the residual secular fascism of the Awami League heritage on one side and the emerging religious nationalism of certain political forces on the other, represents his most recent theoretical contribution to the analysis of Bangladeshi political life and is directly continuous with the theoretical framework he has been developing since the 1990s.

2.3 The Constituent Power Thesis in the Light of the February 2026 Outcome

The February 2026 election and referendum provide the most important data point available for evaluating the constituent power thesis that was so central to Mazhar's political theory and so influential in shaping the ideological framework of the July uprising. The outcome is theoretically complex and politically ambiguous in ways that deserve careful analysis rather than simple verdict.

On the one hand, the constitutional referendum, in which sixty-one percent of voters endorsed the constitutional reform package while the Bangladesh Nationalist Party secured a two-thirds

supermajority [ConstitutionNet](#), represents a formal exercise of popular sovereignty of a kind that Mazhar's theory demands. The people voted on the constitutional framework that would govern their political lives, and they endorsed a package of reforms that, however incompletely and however ambiguously, represents a departure from the constitutional order established under Hasina's authoritarian governance. This is not nothing. It is, in fact, more than most revolutionary political transitions achieve in terms of formal constitutional legitimation.

On the other hand, the specific outcome, a BNP two-thirds majority that will give that party nearly unchecked legislative authority for the next five-year term, raises legitimate concerns about whether the constitutional reforms will be implemented in ways that genuinely constrain executive power and protect the rights of marginal communities, or whether they will be selectively implemented in ways that serve the interests of the political and economic forces that the BNP represents. The constitutional tensions at play in the referendum and election process illustrate a more fundamental problem of political legitimacy: to the extent that the parliament's mandate was predetermined and its members chosen through an election in which the principal opposition was not a participant, ratification risks becoming a plebiscitary ritual rather than a democratic foundation. [The Diplomat](#)

Mazhar's response to this outcome has been, characteristically, to insist that the political struggle continues and that the constitutional changes achieved through the July Charter are a beginning rather than an end of the process of democratic transformation. His analysis of the situation draws on the deep theoretical tradition of thinking about the gap between formal and substantive democracy, between the legal and the political constitution, between the constitutional text and the constitutional practice, that runs through the entire history of democratic theory from Rousseau through Marx to contemporary constitutional scholars.

The constituent power, in this theoretical tradition, is never finally constituted: it remains always as a potential force behind the constituted powers, capable of reasserting itself when the constituted order fails to fulfill the mandate it was given. The February 2026 election represents a constitutive moment but not a finalizing one. The aspiration of the July uprising for a genuinely democratic Bangladesh, for a Bangladesh in which the rights of the poor, the marginalized, the farming communities, the minority communities, and the women who constitute the majority of the population are genuinely protected and not merely formally acknowledged, has not been fully realized and may yet be betrayed by the incoming BNP government. Whether it is or is not will depend in significant part on the continued mobilization of the political forces that the uprising generated and on the continued theoretical and organizational work of the tradition that Mazhar has built and represents.

CHAPTER THREE: CONTROVERSIES AND HONEST RECKONING

3.1 The Fascism Thesis and Its Discontents

No honest assessment of Mazhar's intellectual legacy can avoid engaging with the controversies that his most provocative theoretical and political interventions have generated. The most

significant and most persistent of these controversies concerns his application of the concept of fascism to the political regime of Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League, an application that he began making long before the uprising of 2024 established it as the dominant frame of reference in anti-Hasina political discourse, and that he has extended, in the post-uprising period, to identify multiple other formations that he regards as sharing essential characteristics with the Awami League's governing style.

The theoretical basis for the fascism thesis has been analyzed in detail in Part Five of this textbook. The present task is to assess honestly the strengths and limitations of this theoretical intervention. The strengths are considerable. The analysis of the Hasina government as exhibiting the structural characteristics of fascism, characterized by the fusion of party and state, the systematic elimination of political opposition through legal and extra-legal means, the cultivation of a personality cult around the leader, the deployment of paramilitary forces to suppress popular dissent, and the mobilization of an ideological nationalism that admitted no legitimate internal critique, was theoretically grounded and empirically supported by the evidence of the government's actual behavior over fifteen years in power. The willingness to apply the fascism concept without the qualification and hedging that most Bangladeshi public intellectuals felt it necessary to maintain in the face of the Hasina government's power was an act of intellectual courage that ultimately proved prophetically accurate.

The limitations are also real, however, and deserve acknowledgment. The extension of the fascism concept to describe an increasingly wide range of political formations, including not only the Awami League but certain strands of religious nationalism, certain dimensions of Bengali cultural nationalism, and, in some of his more recent interventions, structures of power that go well beyond any specific party or government, risks diluting the analytical precision that makes the concept valuable as a theoretical tool. When the fascism concept is stretched to cover phenomena that differ significantly in their structural characteristics and their political implications from the paradigmatic cases of German National Socialism and Italian Fascism, it may generate a rhetoric of resistance that is politically energizing but theoretically imprecise.

The related criticism, that Mazhar's characterization of the Awami League as fascist contributed to a political polarization that made it harder to distinguish between the genuine authoritarianism of the Hasina regime and the legitimate political claims of the Awami League's substantial social base, deserves serious consideration. A significant proportion of the Bangladeshi population, including many poor, rural, and minority communities who genuinely benefited from certain policies of the Awami League governments, supported the party for reasons that were not simply ideological manipulation but were grounded in real experiences of material benefit and political protection. A theoretical framework that describes the party that gave them those benefits as simply fascist, without adequate attention to the complex class and communal interests it mediated, may misrepresent the actual social basis of Awami League politics in ways that undermine the construction of genuine alternatives.

3.2 The Islam Question: Between Spiritual Philosophy and Political Alliance

A second area of controversy in Mazhar's intellectual project concerns the relationship between his engagement with Islamic philosophical and spiritual traditions and his political alignments,

particularly his consistent opposition to the secular nationalist dismissal of Islam and his willingness to engage in political discourse and practice with forces that include Islamist political organizations. This aspect of his intellectual biography has generated more misunderstanding, and more politically motivated misrepresentation, than perhaps any other, and it deserves careful analysis.

Mazhar's engagement with Islam is, first and foremost, philosophical rather than political. His interest in the Islamic dimensions of Bengali culture and thought is continuous with his interest in the Baul and Fakiri traditions: it represents an engagement with the spiritual and philosophical resources of the indigenous philosophical traditions of the Bengal delta, resources that include not only the devotional Islam of the Sufi and Fakiri traditions but also the more systematic philosophical traditions of Islamic thought from al-Ghazali through Ibn Rushd to the Bengali Islamic modernism of the twentieth century. This philosophical engagement is rooted in the conviction, argued in detail in his theoretical work, that the secular nationalist dismissal of religion as a mere obstacle to modernization represents a form of cultural imperialism that devalues the spiritual and philosophical traditions of the people it claims to represent and that forecloses the possibility of building the kind of genuinely democratic and culturally inclusive political community that Bangladesh requires.

The political dimension of this philosophical engagement is more complex and more controversial. Mazhar's willingness to engage in dialogue and at times in political cooperation with forces that include Islamist organizations, including, at various points, components of the Hefazat-e-Islam and other religious political formations, has been criticized by secularist Bangladeshi intellectuals as a form of political opportunism that legitimizes forces whose program is antithetical to the democratic and pluralist values that he professes. This criticism has some force, particularly in the light of the post-2024 political environment in which certain religious nationalist forces have demonstrated authoritarian tendencies, including attacks on the Baul tradition that Mazhar has spent decades defending, that sit very uncomfortably alongside his stated commitments to spiritual freedom and cultural pluralism.

Mazhar's response to this criticism draws on the same philosophical framework that informs his engagement with Islam more broadly. He argues, consistently, that the distinction between Islam as a spiritual and philosophical tradition and religious nationalism as a political formation is fundamental and must be maintained, and that engaging with the former does not imply endorsing the latter. He insists that the building of a genuinely democratic Bangladesh requires engaging with the religious sensibilities and the Islamic cultural identity of the majority of the population rather than dismissing them, and that secular intellectuals who refuse to make this engagement are condemning themselves to political irrelevance in a society where religion is a lived reality for most people and where political frameworks that ignore this reality are simply not credible.

This argument has philosophical merit. But it does not fully answer the concern that in the specific context of post-uprising Bangladesh, where the political balance between secular and religious forces is precariously contested and where the stakes of getting the analysis wrong are very high, the tactical flexibility that Mazhar has sometimes shown in his political engagements with Islamist forces may have contributed to outcomes that his own philosophical commitments

would require him to oppose. The intellectual who insists on the distinction between Islam and religious nationalism but whose political practice sometimes blurs that distinction in the heat of political conflict is in a position that requires continuous critical self-scrutiny, and it is not clear that Mazhar has always exercised that scrutiny with sufficient rigor.

3.3 Gender, the Women's Commission, and the Limits of the Framework

A third area of criticism that deserves honest engagement concerns the treatment of gender in Mazhar's intellectual project, and specifically the relationship between the impressive feminist analysis that runs through certain dimensions of his work, particularly the analysis of women as primary holders of agricultural knowledge in the Nayakrishi Andolon context, and the more limited engagement with feminist politics and women's rights in the broader political theory.

The feminist dimension of Mazhar's agrarian theory, as analyzed in Part Seven, is substantive, rigorous, and genuinely important. The recognition of women as the primary custodians of seed diversity and agricultural knowledge, the organizational centrality of women in the governance structures of Nayakrishi Andolon's community seed banks, and the explicit framing of seed rights as women's rights represent genuine philosophical and political contributions to the feminist tradition of agrarian thought.

However, the feminist dimensions of his broader political theory are less developed and less consistently applied. The constitutional reform process that the interim government established in the wake of the uprising included a Women's Affairs Reform Commission that proposed granting equal rights to women regarding property inheritance, a proposal that generated enormous controversy and was met with massive protests from Islamist organizations. The Women's Affairs Reform Commission proposed granting equal rights to women regarding property inheritance, against which Islamists organized massive demonstrations. [Wikipedia](#) Mazhar's response to this controversy, and specifically to the question of whether the opposition of religious forces to women's equal inheritance rights should be resisted or accommodated in the interest of maintaining the political coalition that the constituent power thesis requires, has been less clear and less forceful than the philosophical commitments of his work would lead one to expect.

The gap between the feminist analysis embedded in the agrarian theory and the more limited feminist politics in the constitutional and cultural domains of his broader project reflects a genuine theoretical limitation rather than merely a political pragmatism. A philosophical framework that recognizes the centrality of women's knowledge and women's rights in the agricultural domain but does not with equal rigor and equal urgency extend that recognition to the other domains of social and political life where women's subordination is maintained and reproduced is philosophically inconsistent in ways that have real political consequences. This is a criticism that Mazhar's intellectual project must face honestly and that future developments of the framework must address.

3.4 The Question of Violence and Revolutionary Politics

A further dimension of controversy in Mazhar's intellectual project concerns the relationship between his theory of popular sovereignty and constituent power and the question of political violence. His 1985 book *Sashastra Ganaabhyutthan Ebang Ganatantrik Rashtrer Utthan Prasange*, which translates as *On Armed Mass Revolt and the Rise of the Democratic State*, engaged directly with the question of the role of political violence in revolutionary transformation, and the theoretical framework of the book generated controversy at the time and has continued to generate controversy in the subsequent decades.

The theoretical question involved is of the first importance and cannot be avoided by any serious political philosopher working in the tradition that Mazhar represents. The tradition runs from Rousseau's analysis of the social contract and the question of what happens when the contract is violated, through Marx's analysis of the conditions under which revolutionary violence becomes a historical necessity, through Fanon's analysis of the liberating and the destructive dimensions of colonial violence, to the contemporary debates about the conditions under which political violence can be morally justified. Mazhar's engagement with these questions is theoretically sophisticated and is grounded in the specific historical experience of the Bengali liberation struggle of 1971, in which armed revolt was not only the means by which Bangladesh achieved its independence but the means by which a people that had been subjected to genocidal violence reasserted its right to existence as a political community.

The difficulty with his position, however, is the gap between the theoretical framework, which draws appropriately careful distinctions between defensive violence, revolutionary violence, and state terror, and the political discourse in which the framework is deployed, which has sometimes used the conceptual resources of the theory of revolutionary violence in ways that have contributed to a political atmosphere in which the boundary between legitimate political resistance and illegitimate political violence has been blurred. His characterization of the July uprising as an exercise of constituent power that justifies the forcible removal of a government and the fundamental restructuring of constitutional order raises questions about the criteria by which legitimate constituent action is distinguished from mere political violence that his theoretical framework addresses but does not resolve with the precision that the gravity of the question requires.

CHAPTER FOUR: GLOBAL RESONANCE AND INTERNATIONAL THEORETICAL SIGNIFICANCE

4.1 Postcolonial Theory and the Bengali Contribution

One of the most important dimensions of Mazhar's intellectual legacy is its contribution to the development of postcolonial theory as an international intellectual tradition. Postcolonial theory, as it developed through the work of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in the Anglophone academic world, drew heavily on the experience of South Asian intellectuals who brought to the analysis of colonial power and its cultural legacy the specific

perspective of thinkers who had themselves been formed within colonized societies and who were simultaneously engaging with the metropolitan theoretical traditions of the West.

Spivak's acknowledgment of Mazhar in her Kyoto Prize lecture of 2012, in which she described him as having introduced her to the philosophical tradition of Lalon Shah and credited him with a gift that profoundly shaped her own intellectual work, is not merely a gesture of intellectual friendship. It is a recognition of the substantive contribution that Mazhar's engagement with the indigenous philosophical traditions of the Bengal delta has made to the development of postcolonial theory as an international tradition. The claim that subaltern knowledge and cultural practices have a philosophical standing and a theoretical productivity that cannot be adequately grasped within the frameworks of metropolitan theory, and that genuine postcolonial intellectual work requires a different kind of engagement with indigenous traditions than the merely citational or illustrative engagement that much academic postcolonial theory has offered, is a claim that Mazhar has demonstrated through practice rather than merely asserted through argument.

The international significance of this demonstration extends beyond the specific context of Bengali cultural and philosophical traditions. The model of intellectual engagement that Mazhar represents, in which indigenous philosophical resources are brought into genuine dialogue with the theoretical traditions of the West as equal and original partners rather than as objects of ethnographic description or sources of local color, has implications for the entire project of postcolonial intellectual work in the Global South. The thinkers of Africa, Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific who are engaged in similar projects of philosophical translation and cultural recovery can find in Mazhar's work both a theoretical framework and a practical example of what such translation and recovery look like when pursued with the necessary combination of philosophical seriousness, cultural sensitivity, and political commitment.

4.2 Critical Agrarian Theory and the Global Food Sovereignty Debate

The contribution of Mazhar's agrarian theory to the global food sovereignty debate has already been analyzed extensively in Part Seven, but its global theoretical significance deserves emphasis in the context of assessing his overall intellectual legacy. The food sovereignty movement, as represented internationally by La Via Campesina and its allied organizations and theoretically by the growing tradition of critical agrarian studies, has been enormously enriched by the specific contributions that Mazhar and UBINIG have made through the practical work of Nayakrishi Andolon and the theoretical elaboration of its philosophical foundations.

The specific contribution of the Nayakrishi model to the global debate is the demonstration that biological diversity conservation and ecological agriculture, far from being a nostalgic retreat to a pre-modern past, represent a sophisticated and practically achievable response to the specific ecological and social challenges of the twenty-first century. In the context of a global debate in which the case for agro-biodiversity and farmer knowledge systems has sometimes been made in terms that are vulnerable to the charge of romanticizing traditional practices without adequate attention to the practical challenges of feeding a rapidly urbanizing world population, the Nayakrishi model provides a rigorously documented, empirically grounded, and practically detailed demonstration that the alternative is real and workable.

The philosophical dimension of this contribution, the argument that the recovery of biological diversity is simultaneously an ecological, an economic, an epistemological, a cultural, and a spiritual achievement, has also contributed to the theoretical development of the food sovereignty framework in ways that have made it more philosophically coherent and more politically compelling. The most recent theoretical synthesis in the field, published in 2026, argues that the metabolic rift concept, the food sovereignty framework, and the tradition of critical agrarian studies are mutually enriching and that the food sovereignty movement's six pillars of local production and resource circulation offer a concrete path to repair the metabolic rift. [Taylor & Francis Online](#) This convergence directly reflects the theoretical work that Mazhar has been doing for four decades.

4.3 Constitutional Theory and Democratic Transition Studies

Mazhar's contribution to constitutional theory and democratic transition studies, through his development of the constituent power thesis and his application of it to the specific conditions of Bangladesh's political transformation, represents a third major area of international theoretical significance. The theory of constituent power, as developed in the European and North American constitutional theory traditions, has generally been elaborated in the context of historical cases, the American and French revolutions, the Weimar Republic, and more recently the Latin American constitutional transformations, that are distant in time and context from the immediate practical politics of contemporary postcolonial societies. Mazhar's contribution has been to demonstrate the theoretical and practical relevance of constituent power theory to the specific conditions of a contemporary postcolonial uprising, providing both a theoretical framework that anticipated the political dynamics of the July uprising and an analytical vocabulary through which the students and activists who led the uprising could understand what they were doing.

The significance of this contribution for constitutional theory is substantial. The literature on democratic transitions and constitutional moments has, until very recently, focused primarily on transitions from authoritarian rule in the context of fully consolidated nation-states with established legal traditions and functioning civil societies. Bangladesh in 2024 represented a different and in some respects more challenging case: a society with a legal tradition deeply shaped by colonial inheritance, a civil society whose independence had been systematically undermined by fifteen years of authoritarian governance, and a political culture in which the available institutional frameworks for channeling constituent power into constitutional form were themselves compromised by their complicity with the authoritarianism they were being asked to replace.

Mazhar's theoretical framework for understanding and navigating this situation, drawing on the resources of European constitutional theory while subjecting it to the critical revision demanded by the postcolonial context, represents a contribution to constitutional theory that is of genuine international interest. The constitutional referendum of February 2026, in which voters in Bangladesh cast ballots on a sweeping package of constitutional reforms while simultaneously choosing parliamentary representation, represents one of the most ambitious and most institutionally complex constitutional moments in the history of postcolonial democratic transitions. [ConstitutionNet](#) The theoretical framework developed by Mazhar, imperfect as it is

in certain respects, provided the most important available intellectual resources for understanding and evaluating this process.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY AS PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENT

5.1 What the Life Teaches

There is a sense in which the most important philosophical argument that Farhad Mazhar's intellectual career makes is not contained in any of the specific theoretical propositions of his work, however significant those propositions are, but in the structure of the career itself, in what the life as a whole demonstrates about the possibilities of intellectual engagement in conditions of political subordination and cultural imperialism. The argument that the life makes, by example rather than by proposition, is that genuine intellectual freedom is possible even in conditions of systematic political repression, economic marginalization, and cultural dismissal, and that the exercise of that freedom is not merely a personal achievement but a political act of the first importance.

The specific form that this argument takes in Mazhar's case is shaped by the particular conditions of intellectual life in Bangladesh, conditions that include a long history of colonial subordination that has produced a deeply ingrained tendency among intellectual elites to seek validation from metropolitan centers of cultural production rather than from the indigenous traditions of their own societies. Mazhar's career-long refusal of this tendency, his insistence on the philosophical seriousness and the cultural dignity of the traditions of the Bengal delta against the dismissals of both colonial modernity and the postcolonial cultural establishment that inherited its hierarchies, is an argument demonstrated through practice rather than stated through proposition.

The costs of this refusal, which have been catalogued throughout this textbook, including the repeated arrests and persecution, the 2017 disappearance, the sustained campaigns of political and cultural delegitimization, the marginalization within the official intellectual and cultural establishment, are themselves part of the argument. They demonstrate, by negative example, the stakes of genuine intellectual independence in a society in which the powerful regard genuinely independent critical thought as a threat to be suppressed rather than a resource to be cultivated. They also demonstrate the durability of genuine intellectual conviction against sustained institutional pressure, showing that it is possible to maintain critical independence over a career spanning more than fifty years without either capitulating to power or retreating into the self-protecting irrelevance of the purely academic.

5.2 The Paradox of Influence: From Margins to History

Among the most philosophically interesting aspects of Mazhar's intellectual biography is the paradox of his relationship to influence. For most of his career, Mazhar occupied a position of deliberate marginality within the intellectual and political establishment of Bangladesh, choosing to work through alternative institutions rather than through the universities, the mainstream

media, and the established political parties that might have offered greater immediate influence and greater personal security. This deliberate marginality was not a failure of ambition or a retreat from engagement; it was a principled philosophical choice, rooted in the conviction that genuine intellectual independence requires institutional independence, and that the forms of compromise that integration into the established institutions of intellectual and cultural life demands are philosophically unacceptable for a thinker committed to speaking truth to power.

The extraordinary vindication of this strategic marginality that came with the 2024 uprising and its aftermath is philosophically instructive in ways that extend well beyond the specific context of Bangladeshi intellectual politics. The demonstration that a body of theoretical work, produced over five decades through small-circulation publications, alternative organizational structures, and networks of intellectual and political engagement that bypassed the mainstream institutions of the cultural establishment, could at the right historical moment exercise decisive influence on the political consciousness of a generation and help shape the course of a national political transformation is a demonstration of the long-term power of serious intellectual work that the philosophy of culture should take very seriously.

This demonstration does not, of course, prove that all marginal intellectual positions are correct or that all mainstream intellectual positions are compromised. It proves something more specific and more important: that the relationship between intellectual seriousness and institutional influence is not straightforward, that the pursuit of genuine truth and genuine political insight is sometimes more possible at the margins than at the center, and that the patient accumulation of a body of serious theoretical work can, in ways that cannot be predicted in advance and that require specific historical conditions for their realization, change the world in ways that more immediately influential but less intellectually serious positions cannot.

5.3 The Bengali Intellectual Tradition: Where Mazhar Stands

Any assessment of Mazhar's intellectual legacy must situate him within the broader tradition of Bengali intellectual thought and culture, a tradition of extraordinary richness and depth that includes, among many others, the philosophical poets of the medieval Vaishnava tradition, the Baul and Fakiri singers and philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the reformist and nationalist intellectuals of the Bengal renaissance, Rabindranath Tagore's synthetic philosophical-literary project, the political philosophers and revolutionary activists of the independence movement, and the generations of Bangladeshi intellectuals who have worked in the conditions of independence since 1971.

Within this tradition, Mazhar occupies a distinctive and in certain respects unique position. He is the thinker who has most systematically and most seriously attempted to bring into genuine philosophical dialogue the classical indigenous philosophical traditions of the Bengal delta, the philosophical resources of the Western critical tradition, and the specific political and ecological challenges of postcolonial Bangladesh in the twenty-first century. He shares with Tagore the ambition of synthesis, the refusal to accept the separation of the aesthetic and the philosophical, the poetic and the political, the indigenous and the universal. But his synthesis is different in character from Tagore's: less harmonizing, less idealist, more attentive to contradiction, conflict, and the material basis of cultural and spiritual life.

He shares with the Baul and Fakiri tradition, and particularly with his great intellectual ancestor Lalon Shah, the commitment to a spiritual and philosophical approach to the deepest questions of human existence and human community that is radically anti-authoritarian, anti-dogmatic, and oriented toward the inner life of the individual in relationship rather than toward the external forms of religious or political conformity. But he brings to this tradition a theoretical sophistication and a political urgency that gives it new dimensions and new applications in the conditions of the contemporary world.

He shares with the tradition of Bengali Marxism, and particularly with its most sophisticated representatives like Muzaffar Ahmad and Abu Sayeed Ayyub, the conviction that the transformation of unjust social and political structures is the most urgent practical task that a serious intellectual must engage with. But he brings to this tradition a critical rigor and a philosophical depth that refuses the simplifications of orthodox Marxism and insists on the complexity of the revolutionary project in its cultural, spiritual, and ecological dimensions.

The intellectual synthesis that Mazhar represents is, in this context, not merely a personal achievement but a cultural one: the achievement of a thinker who has drawn together the deepest threads of the Bengali philosophical tradition and woven them into a new pattern that is both continuous with that tradition and genuinely new.

CHAPTER SIX: THE UNFINISHED PROJECT AND ITS FUTURE

6.1 The Questions That Remain Open

The most intellectually productive way to conclude an assessment of Mazhar's intellectual legacy is not to close it but to open it: to identify the questions that his work has raised but not fully answered, the theoretical tensions it has generated but not finally resolved, and the areas in which the further development of his intellectual project, whether by Mazhar himself in whatever years of intellectual activity remain to him or by the tradition of thinkers who will engage with and extend his work, is most urgently needed.

The first and most fundamental of these open questions concerns the relationship between the theory of constituent power and the theory of agrarian transformation. Mazhar has argued, with philosophical force, that these are connected dimensions of a single project, that genuine democratic transformation in Bangladesh requires both a new constitutional framework grounded in the constituent power of the people and a fundamental restructuring of the agrarian order that gives farming communities genuine sovereignty over their land, seeds, and agricultural knowledge. But the theoretical framework through which these two dimensions of the project are connected remains underdeveloped. How, specifically, would a constitutional framework grounded in genuine popular sovereignty produce the conditions for agrarian transformation? What institutional forms would mediate between the formal constitutional provisions and the material conditions of rural life? What are the specific mechanisms through which the constituent power of the people, as manifested in political uprising and constitutional deliberation, would translate into the redistribution of agrarian resources and the legal

recognition of farmers' rights? These questions are addressed in Mazhar's work in broad philosophical terms but not in the institutional and legal detail that would make the theory fully actionable.

The second open question concerns the relationship between ecological agriculture and economic development in the specific conditions of contemporary Bangladesh. The Nayakrishi Andolon model has demonstrated the viability of ecological agriculture for the farming communities directly involved in it. But Bangladesh is a rapidly urbanizing society, and the economic development model that has driven that urbanization, based on export-oriented garment manufacture and the remittances of migrant workers, is deeply different from the ecologically grounded, locally embedded development model that Mazhar's agrarian theory implies. How are these two models of development to be related? What is the theory of the transition from the current model to the alternative, and through what political, economic, and institutional mechanisms would that transition be accomplished? The outlines of an answer to these questions are present in Mazhar's work, but the detailed theoretical elaboration remains to be done.

The third open question, and in some respects the most philosophically challenging, concerns the relationship between the spiritual democracy grounded in Lalon's philosophy and the formal structures of democratic governance. Mazhar has argued persuasively that genuine democracy requires a cultural and spiritual foundation that formal institutions alone cannot provide, and that the tradition of spiritual freedom, inner authenticity, and cross-boundary solidarity that the Baul and Fakiri traditions represent provides exactly the kind of cultural foundation that Bangladeshi democracy needs. But the relationship between this cultural foundation and the specific institutional arrangements of democratic governance, the electoral system, the constitutional framework, the legal protections for rights, remains theoretically underspecified. What would a constitutional framework grounded in the spiritual democracy of the Baul tradition actually look like? What specific institutional provisions would express and protect the values of inner freedom and communal solidarity that that tradition articulates? These are questions that the theory raises but does not answer, and that the philosophical tradition Mazhar has built would need to address in order to achieve the full practical significance it claims.

6.2 The Generation That Inherits the Project

The question of who will carry forward the intellectual project that Mazhar has built is one that cannot be answered with certainty but that can be addressed in terms of the tradition he has created and the generation of thinkers and activists who have been formed within it. The most important evidence for the vitality and the durability of the tradition is provided by precisely the events that have been analyzed throughout this textbook: the role of the theoretical framework developed through Chinta and Gono-Ovyutthan o Gathan in shaping the political consciousness of the generation that led the July uprising.

Mazhar has himself reflected on this generational transmission, noting that it took decades for a community to produce the young people who led the student movement, and insisting that those who look ahead and talk about the present understand that they will get the results of the intellectual leap that has happened in Bangladesh because of the youth. [The Business Standard](#)

This reflection expresses, with characteristic modesty, the conviction that the intellectual work he has done over five decades was not done for his own generation alone but for the generations that would inherit it, and that the measure of its success is not the influence it has exercised in any single political moment but the depth of the political consciousness it has helped to form over the long term.

The tradition that Mazhar has built is not merely a set of theoretical propositions that can be summarized and transmitted in textbook form. It is a mode of intellectual engagement, a way of relating theory to practice, of inhabiting multiple philosophical traditions simultaneously, of remaining simultaneously committed and critical, simultaneously rooted in specific cultural traditions and open to universal theoretical dialogue, simultaneously engaged with the most immediate political urgencies of the day and oriented toward the deepest long-term questions of what it means to live well and to live justly in a world characterized by structural inequality and ecological crisis. This mode of engagement is what the tradition transmits, and it is what makes the tradition genuinely alive rather than merely historically interesting.

The young intellectuals and activists who will carry this tradition forward face challenges that are in many respects more complex than those that Mazhar faced at the beginning of his career. The ideological landscape they must navigate is more fragmented and more rapidly changing than the landscape of the 1960s and 1970s. The political opportunities and the political dangers of the post-2024 moment are both more immediate and more unpredictable than any that the previous generation encountered. The ecological crisis that Mazhar has been warning about for four decades is now producing its consequences with a speed and a severity that leaves less and less time for the patient accumulation of theoretical understanding before the practical urgencies of adaptation and survival demand responses.

But the tradition that Mazhar has built is, if anything, better equipped to address these challenges than any of the theoretical traditions that preceded it in the Bengali intellectual landscape. Its combination of philosophical depth, practical organizational experience, cultural sensitivity, and political courage is precisely the combination that the challenges of the twenty-first century require. And the demonstration it has already provided, that genuinely serious intellectual work can at the right historical moment exercise decisive political influence and help reshape the trajectory of a nation's history, is the most powerful argument available for the continuing importance and the continuing urgency of that work.

6.3 The Question of Bangladesh as a Philosophical Problem

The final reflection this textbook wishes to offer on Farhad Mazhar's intellectual legacy concerns the relationship between his specific intellectual project and the broader question of what Bangladesh represents as a political and philosophical problem in the history of the modern world.

Bangladesh is a nation born in catastrophic violence, shaped by the multiple inheritances of Muslim Bengali identity, of colonial modernity, of the partition of the subcontinent, and of the liberation struggle of 1971, and perpetually suspended between the developmental aspirations of the global neoliberal order and the ecological, cultural, and social specificities of the Bengal

delta. It is a nation that has demonstrated, repeatedly and most dramatically in July 2024, a capacity for political mobilization and popular resistance that challenges the narrative of passive developmental victimhood that much international commentary assigns to the Global South. And it is a nation in which the questions of democracy, development, religion, cultural identity, ecological sustainability, and social justice are posed with an urgency and a complexity that makes it a kind of philosophical laboratory for the central questions of the twenty-first century.

Farhad Mazhar has spent his intellectual career insisting on the philosophical significance of this specificity, arguing against every form of universalism that would assimilate Bangladesh's specific predicament to a general developmental narrative or a universal theoretical framework, and insisting that the resources for understanding and addressing Bangladesh's specific challenges are to be found, at least in significant part, in the specific intellectual and cultural traditions of the Bengal delta. In this insistence, he has been profoundly right.

The philosophical significance of the Bengali Fakiri tradition, of the ecological wisdom of the delta farming communities, of the political theology embedded in Lalon's songs, of the specific democratic impulse that has driven the repeated popular risings of Bangladesh's history, is not merely local. It is universal in the only sense in which genuine universality is possible: the sense in which the deeply specific, when genuinely understood, illuminates the general, in which the particular example, when taken seriously on its own terms, teaches something that the abstract principle cannot. The intellectual tradition that Farhad Mazhar has built, by taking Bangladesh seriously as a philosophical problem and the philosophical resources of the Bengal delta seriously as resources for universal thought, has produced a body of work that speaks not only to Bangladesh but to the wider world of people struggling, in their own specific conditions, with the same fundamental questions of how to live with dignity and justice and ecological wisdom in a world that systematically frustrates all three.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION: THE RIVER AND THE SEED

This biography has followed Farhad Mazhar from the delta landscape of Noakhali in 1947, through the political upheavals of East Pakistan and the liberation war of 1971, through the pharmacies and seminars of New York City, through the intellectual ferment of Dhaka in the 1980s and 1990s, through the patient organizational work of UBINIG and Nayakrishi Andolon, through the political battles and the periods of persecution and the ongoing engagement with the constitutional transformations of a country that refuses to stop reinventing itself, and through the extraordinary events of 2024, 2025, and 2026 that have brought his intellectual project into direct contact with the making of history.

What has this long journey produced? The honest answer is that it has produced more than can be summarized in any final verdict. It has produced a body of theoretical work of genuine philosophical depth and originality that deserves, and has not yet received, the international attention it merits. It has produced a model of public intellectual practice that demonstrates, against all the institutional pressures toward accommodation and all the personal pressures toward safety, that genuine intellectual independence is possible and that it matters. It has

produced, through UBINIG and Nayakrishi Andolon, a set of practical institutions that have sustained, over thirty years, an alternative vision of agricultural and community life that has kept alive, in the fields and the seed banks of rural Bangladesh, a biological and cultural wealth that the dominant developmental order was in the process of destroying. And it has produced, through the theoretical framework crystallized in Gono-Ovyutthan o Gathan, a contribution to the political consciousness of a generation that played its role, larger than any single individual can take credit for but genuinely enabled by Mazhar's theoretical work, in the political transformation of Bangladesh in 2024.

The river image, so central to the Bengali cultural imagination and so foundational to the ecological landscape of Noakhali where Mazhar was born, provides one metaphor for the character of this intellectual project. Like a river, it is always in motion, always changing its course, always finding new channels through the landscape it traverses, and always, in the process, both eroding and depositing, both destroying old formations and building new ones. The seed image, so central to the agrarian philosophy of Nayakrishi Andolon, provides another and perhaps deeper metaphor. The intellectual work of a lifetime is like a seed: it contains, in concentrated form, the accumulated inheritance of what came before, and it is simultaneously the potential from which what comes after will grow.

Both images are about time, about the relationship between the past and the future, about what is transmitted across generations and how. And both images, in the context of Mazhar's intellectual project, are also images of resistance, the river that finds its way through even the hardest rock, the seed that survives the longest winter to germinate when conditions finally allow. The intellectual tradition that Farhad Mazhar has built is alive with this kind of resistant temporal energy. It was built for the long term. It has already demonstrated its durability across more than five decades of sustained intellectual and political engagement. And it is, if the analysis offered in this textbook is correct, only at the beginning of its full historical significance.

The questions Mazhar has spent his life asking, about the relationship between freedom and community, between ecology and justice, between spiritual life and democratic politics, between indigenous wisdom and universal theory, between the particular richness of the Bengal delta and the universal challenges of the twenty-first century, are the questions that the history now being made in Bangladesh and in the wider world most urgently needs to answer. The fact that a thinker from Noakhali, working for fifty years through alternative institutions and marginal publications and the patient practice of genuine intellectual seriousness, has produced a body of work that addresses those questions with more depth, more originality, and more practical wisdom than most of the better-resourced and better-recognized intellectual traditions of the contemporary world is itself a philosophical argument, an argument about where genuine thought comes from and what it is for. It is an argument that this textbook has attempted to make visible, and that the history of Bangladesh will continue, in ways that no textbook can fully anticipate, to make real.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC AND THEORETICAL NOTES FOR PART EIGHT

On the theory of intellectual legacy and the history of intellectual traditions, the foundational texts include Pierre Nora's edited collection *Les Lieux de Memoire*, translated as *Realms of Memory*, which provides the most theoretically sophisticated framework for thinking about how intellectual traditions are constituted and transmitted through cultural memory. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) provides the broader framework for understanding the relationship between intellectual traditions and national communities. Reinhart Koselleck's *Futures Past*, translated by Keith Tribe, provides the most important philosophical analysis of the temporal dimensions of historical consciousness. Stefan Collini's *Absent Minds: Intellectuals in Britain* (2006) provides a thoughtful comparative framework for thinking about the relationship between intellectual figures and their national intellectual cultures.

On the February 2026 Bangladesh elections and constitutional referendum, the primary sources include the analysis published by ConstitutionNet in March 2026 on Bangladesh's referendum and the need to return to a constitutional process [ConstitutionNet](#), the analysis published in the *Journal of Democracy* on the prospects for Bangladesh's democratic experiment [Journal of Democracy](#), the December 2025 analysis of the July Charter and constitutional reforms published by International IDEA's ConstitutionNet [ConstitutionNet](#), and the detailed Wikipedia documentation of the 2026 Bangladeshi general election and its outcomes [Wikipedia](#).

On Mazhar's post-uprising intellectual and political engagement, the primary sources include his interviews and public statements recorded in *The Business Standard*, [bdnews24.com](#), and *Views Bangladesh* throughout 2024 and 2025, his appearance at the Bangladesh Future Forum 2026 as documented on the forum's website, and the continuing publication of his essays in *Chinta*. His speech at the Chattogram Press Club in July 2025 [The Business Standard](#), his speech at the Imaginext Foundation roundtable in April 2025 [BD News 24](#), and his interview with [bdnews24.com](#) in May 2025 on the battle against religious nationalism [BD News 24](#) are the most important single primary sources for his post-uprising thinking.

On the theory of postcolonial intellectuals and intellectual traditions, the foundational texts are Edward Said's *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Ranajit Guha's essays collected in *A Subaltern Studies Reader* (1997), and Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2000). The more recent scholarship includes Raewyn Connell's *Southern Theory* (2007), which provides the most systematic argument for the intellectual significance of theoretical traditions developed in the Global South, and the contributions to the volume *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* edited by Ania Loomba and others (2005). Spivak's engagement with Mazhar's work, documented in her Kyoto Prize lecture of 2012, provides the most important single primary source for the international recognition of Mazhar's contribution to postcolonial theory.

On Bengali intellectual history and the tradition within which Mazhar works, the essential scholarly texts include Sumit Sarkar's *A Critical Dictionary of the Indian Intellectual Tradition* (2021), Partha Chatterjee's *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993), Sudipta Kaviraj's *The Unhappy Consciousness* (1995) on Bankimchandra and the formation of Bengali intellectual modernity, and the essays collected in *Muslim Societies in South Asia* edited by T. N. Madan. For the specifically Bangladeshi dimension, the scholarship of Rounaq Jahan, Rehman Sobhan, and the contributions to the *Bangladesh Development Studies* journal provide essential context. For the

Baul and Fakiri tradition specifically, the scholarship cited in the bibliographic notes to Parts Five and Six remains essential.

On the philosophy of intellectual legacy and what intellectual traditions transmit, Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* (1989) provides the most philosophically sophisticated analysis of how moral and intellectual traditions are constituted and transmitted through individual and collective identity. Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981) provides the framework for thinking about traditions as ongoing arguments about the goods that constitute them. And Gadamer's *Truth and Method* (1960), with its account of the historically situated character of understanding and the way in which tradition enables rather than constrains genuine comprehension, provides the deepest philosophical framework for understanding how an intellectual tradition like the one Farhad Mazhar has built can speak across generations and across contexts to the universal concerns that its specific particularity embodies.

On democratic theory and constitutional transitions in postcolonial contexts, the works cited in the bibliographic notes to Parts Five and Six remain essential. The specific literature on the Bangladeshi constitutional transition includes the reports of the reform commissions established by the Yunus interim government, available through the Government of Bangladesh and through the International IDEA constitutional design database, the analysis of the July Charter by Muhammad Ekramul Haque and Sumit Bisarya published in *ConstitutionNet* in December 2025, and the emerging academic literature on the February 2026 elections and referendum in journals including the *Journal of Democracy*, *Democratization*, and *Asian Survey*.

On the relationship between ecological crisis and agrarian transformation as it has developed in the most recent theoretical literature, the works cited in the bibliographic notes to Part Seven provide the essential foundation. The most recent contributions include the articles published in the *Journal of Peasant Studies* throughout 2025 and 2026 on the third Nyéléni Forum and its implications for the global food sovereignty movement, the ongoing work of the IPES-Food panel on sustainable food systems, and the developing literature on climate adaptation and agricultural biodiversity in the context of South Asian climate vulnerability.

This textbook is now complete in its eight parts. Part One examined the intellectual origins of Farhad Mazhar, tracing his formation in the landscape of Noakhali, his student years at the University of Dhaka, and his encounter with the political crisis of East Pakistan. Part Two analyzed his theoretical formation in New York City and at the New School for Social Research. Parts Three and Four examined his return to Bangladesh and the development of his political philosophy through the crises of the 1980s and 1990s. Part Five analyzed the theory of constituent power and popular sovereignty that would prove so influential in 2024. Part Six examined his practice as a public intellectual, his institutions, and his personal and political costs. Part Seven provided a systematic analysis of his agrarian theory and the Nayakrishi Andolon movement. Part Eight has assessed the intellectual legacy in its full dimensions, evaluating its philosophical achievements, its practical consequences, its controversies and limitations, its global resonance, and its future possibilities.

The figure that emerges from this eight-part study is among the most significant radical thinkers produced by the postcolonial world in the second half of the twentieth century: a poet who thinks, a philosopher who organizes, an ecologist who constitutionalizes, and a spiritual seeker who refuses every political and cultural conformity in the name of the deepest freedom. The Bengal delta that shaped him and that he has spent his life defending against its many forms of destruction is the poorer for every compromise that his intellectual successors might make with the forces he spent his life opposing, and it is the richer for every seed that his thought has planted in the minds and the commitments of those who will carry his project forward into the uncertain and urgent future that awaits it.

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